

TEXTUAL PROJECTIONS:  
THE EMERGENCE OF A POSTCOLONIAL AMERICAN GOTHIC

By

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Robert C. Schachel

To my father

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This study traces a specific psychological thread through the works of Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and H. P. Lovecraft to reveal one particular source of America's emergent gothic literature. Working within a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework that provides a point of engagement with narratives of American postcolonial experiences, the arc of this study moves through the Nineteenth Century, from Irving to Lovecraft, focusing on the psychological angst of America's condition as an emerging postcolonial nation.

Chapter Two examines the seeds of American gothic writing by looking at Irving's most famous stories, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," in their original context of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*. Irving's treatment of the landscape lays the foundation for what Victoria Nelson terms a "psychotopography" of a postcolonial America.



Chapter Three considers this foundation taken to its abstract extreme in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, culminating with a look at his novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Poe employs word play and geographical abstraction to manifest the expression of a conflicted postcolonial personal self-narrativization.

Chapter Four analyzes the manner in which Nathaniel Hawthorne confronts the intersection of both his personal and national genealogies. Through his short fiction such as “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” “Alice Doane’s Appeal,” and “The Custom House” introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne obscures the boundaries between historical, psychological, and fictional narrative.

Chapter Five continues to examine Hawthorne’s psychotopography in his “Legends of the Province House” and *The House of the Seven Gables*. One sees how Hawthorne textually wanders through the history of America, finding a fragmented, conflicted, and gothic-influenced collection of ambivalent signification.

Chapter Six examines the psychotopography of an abstracted and unnamed New York as Melville presents it in his novel *Pierre*. Melville uses New York City as a geographical topos as he reconceptualizes the patricidal narrative on the level of an imagined individual history.

Chapter Seven delves into the serpiginous psychotopography of H. P. Lovecraft’s “Cthulhu Mythos” showing how through the body of his tales he attacks history and postcolonial significations. Building on the psychotopographies of his literary predecessors, he culminates the work begun by Irving and truly modernizes the American Gothic.

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION: THE RELENTLESS WORKING OUT  
OF AN ANCESTRAL CURSE

Any approach to analyzing American Gothic has, at its core, a problem of definition. Theresa Goddu points out, “Just as *gothic* unsettles the idea of America, the modifier *American* destabilizes understandings of the gothic” (4). Problematic tautologies such as this one fill criticism of the genre. While they highlight a truth, they rarely move beyond describing the general “gothicness” of the Gothic. Nevertheless, the veracity in such observations provides a reasonable base from which one can introduce a more specific analysis of the genre. Leslie Fiedler famously asserted that the place of the Gothic is, “of course, the world of dreams and of the repressed guilts and fears that motivate them” (140). Perhaps the best general observation of Gothic classification comes from Theresa Goddu’s book, *Gothic America*:

Despite its formulaic and conventional nature, despite its easily listed elements and effects—haunted houses, evil villains, ghosts, gloomy landscapes, madness, terror, suspense, horror—the gothic’s parameters and ‘essence’ remain unclear. While easy classification seems to imply a definitional stability, the gothic genre is extremely mutable. Cobbled together of many different forms and obsessed with transgressing boundaries, it represents itself not as stable but as generically impure. (5)

The concepts of impurity and instability imply a continuing rift between the ideal and the actual, between perception and reality, and the working definitions of the Gothic from which this study proceeds begin at this point.

The tropes listed by Goddu are commonly known and, as she points out, to define the Gothic using them as a standard reifies simple dichotomies the genre itself attempts to

undermine. Therefore, one should approach such a subjective term by beginning with the subject. Freud's concept of *projection*, as he describes it in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), offers a subject-centered explanation for feelings of haunting:

The [repressed, unconscious] hostility [of the subject] . . . is ejected from internal perception into the external world, and thus detached from [the subject] and pushed on to someone else. It is no longer true that they are rejoicing to be rid of the dead man; on the contrary, they are mourning for him; but, strange to say, he has turned into a wicked demon ready to gloat over their misfortunes and eager to kill them.  
(79)

Freud then applies his term to the Oedipal conflict, extrapolating that the idea and presence of the father becomes more powerful and influential after his death (178). The subject's repression of his desire for the sole affections of the mother as a result of the presence of the father therefore initiates an emergence of the superego to balance the id, with the ego itself as gatekeeper of substitution.

Yet in "The Uncanny" (1919), Freud examines the gap left by this repression in terms of aesthetics, discussing the emotional expression of the return of the repressed as belonging to "all that arouses dread and creeping horror" (122). Though Freud cannot fully define the sources of the dread—he can only assume from symptoms—in this essay he lays the groundwork from which Lacanian psychoanalysis provides a structure for tracing individual threads of haunting within the Gothic. Freud asserts, "an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes" (152). Building upon Freud's observations with a Lacanian approach, one sees how the Uncanny occurs during a slippage of signification—since as Danielle Bergeron sums up Lacan's notion of the function of language, "the signifier is the writing

of a loss establishing the subject as a real, a position determined by the Other” (“The Signifier” 61). That “loss”—the inaugural event during which the imposition of the paternal metaphor occurs—instills that “the function of the father is to represent the law of the signifier and its primacy for the human subject” (Cantin 41). Human subjectivity—an identity, albeit one founded on alienation—begins with the prescription of language. That language remains anchored in the paternal metaphor, and prevents the chain of signification from unraveling.<sup>1</sup>

Though the magnification of the Oedipal conflict from a subject to a nation has its problems, postcolonial critics often refer to colonizing countries or cultures in such terms. Such an analysis invites dangerous generalizations and again sets up dichotomies that oversimplify conflicts in history. For example, stating that America overthrew the paternalistic presence of Britain overlooks the emerging nation’s internal conflicts of slavery, gender, and western expansion. Narrowing that statement to a specific viewpoint of certain writers of an emerging American nation who sought to speak on behalf of a broader American audience restricts such historical generalizations. Writers like Brown, Irving, Poe, Emerson, and Hawthorne arguably operated within an Oedipal framework. Each wrestled with the questions of what an American literature should be. Lawrence Buell points out the “possible hypocrisy” and problematic simplification of viewing American literature as “postcolonial rather than proto-imperial” (411). Yet Charles Brockden Brown argues at the start of *Edgar Huntly* (1799), “That new springs of action, and new motives to curiosity should operate; that the field of investigation, opened to us by *our own country*, should *differ essentially from those which exist in Europe*, may readily be conceived” (641, emphasis added). Declarations such as this one suggest that

American authors wrestled with the idea of American identity as a nation after the Revolution, and that the crisis indeed had Oedipal characteristics, with the shadow of a paternalistic England embodying the role of the Other.

Lawrence Buell observes that one mark of postcolonialism in American Renaissance writing is “the expectation that artists be responsible agents for achieving national liberation, which in turn bespeaks a non-specialized conception of art and an ambivalence toward aestheticism that threatens to produce schizophrenia” (429).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, whereas a first generation writer like Washington Irving could frame his tales with a humorous veneer, second-generation writers like Poe and Hawthorne could no longer contain the personal and national neurosis that a break with a paternal historical narrative had induced. If, as Lacan famously stated, “*the unconscious is the discourse of the Other*” (“Seminar” 32), and if, as Freud asserts, the *uncanny* is one of many potential discourses of the unconscious, then in the emerging American Gothic one can trace a thread of the uncanny to reveal the pressures this group of writers sought to express. Moreover, one sees how the presence of historical *objects*, including the American landscape itself, serves as a conduit for both alienation as well as a means of expressing that alienation.

In tracing that thread, one must take into account the effect a postcolonial literature has on its own critical analysis. Goddu rightly observes, “Whether the American gothic is subsumed into the British, excised from the tradition, or relegated to a subsidiary role, The British paradigm remains securely in place. By marginalizing the American gothic, both American and gothic studies limit its challenge to critical consensus” (162). Hence, one should be careful to recognize the emergence of American Gothic as both a genre of

itself as well as one that resisted pressures from a European counterpart. In so doing, one may recognize that while both may have similar (if not the same) kernels of origin, they encompass an expression of wholly different threads of literary and cultural neuroses.

This study has excluded an exploration of Charles Brockden Brown, for example, because of his deliberate writing against the British Gothic, of which the subtitle of *Wieland—An American Tale*—appears as a symptom. The dichotomy established by Brown’s grudgingly transplanted Gothic remains too teleological to reflect fully and naturally the anxieties of a young nation. In contrast, writers like Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville did not write against postcolonial pressures in a dichotomous fashion that affirmed the authority of Britain or Europe by openly denying it. In fact, by the time Poe began publishing, such a dichotomy would be ineffective, as regional tensions and histories began to exert their own pressures upon the American authorial subject. Poe, for example, found grand dichotomies to be both didactic and insufficient to express the American character. This view ironically put him at odds with the Transcendentalists, whose definitions were too distinct to admit the Gothic as a form of Transcendentalism.

As a result, Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville recognized the roots of their alienation—both personal and national. Rather than writing in direct opposition to those roots, which would leave the primary alienating structures intact, these writers sought ways in which to hollow out, frustrate, or re-encode the signifiers of those structures. Signification necessarily relies on history as Lacan points out, “the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by deploying its dimension in some sense before it” while forming meaning retrospectively as the chain unfolds from its anchor (“Instance” 145). The writers of the American Renaissance faced a particular problem—how does

one redirect a system of signification when one's environment remains filled with signifiers of an alienating colonial past?

In order to undermine those signifiers, one must in some way destabilize the history that supports them. The Young America Movement simply modeled their attempts at founding a national literature after European precursors. The Hudson River School of painting, in contrast, began with the one thing America had that England did not—the American landscape. This concept, termed by Myra Jehlen the “American Incarnation” (3), appears as an attempt to reanchor the American narrative to a shared idea without the ghost of a paternal British Other. Washington Irving comes close to achieving that task by looking to the Dutch as an alternate identity anchor in his writing, thereby undermining British authority on American soil. Yet he must still acknowledge both the alienation and the conflicts the ghosts of British authority stir in a new American subjectivity.

By the time of the American Renaissance, a second generation of writers raised on Irving's tales could no longer look to the promise of a new land or an alternate anchor for the chain of the nations narrative. Instead, examining that chain highlighted multiple narratives of America, illustrated a foreclosure of the American ideal, and led those writers to narrativize themselves as part of the emerging history of the young nation. Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville had no choice but to seek to push the limits of what they saw as their prescribed identities, already unfolded for them as an incipient history. Aware of their self-narrativization, they sought to express it, perhaps even to catch up to it, by excavating the cores of their own subjectivity. Those narratives were founded on signifiers of a material history—physical objects such as a portrait, a house, or a place—

that served as complex, identifying, and alienating mirrors for both the author as well as the nation. For Poe it was geography; for Hawthorne it was the houses and land of his Puritan ancestors; for Melville, it was the anonymity of the New York cityscape. For Lovecraft, it was the eldritch ruins of a prehuman civilization. Each of these authors pushes the limits of significance to attack their own subjectivity using the very presence of the past that helps to determine it.

That physical objects play a crucial psychological role in the construction of subjectivity for these authors works well, given the implied material underpinnings of the Lacanian Real. The dimensional mass of the object—a desk or a house for example—asserts a narrative that existed before the subject, and potentially will exist after it. At the same time, it occupies a place in the present, acting as a conduit of history for the subject, bringing him or her in contact—physical contact—with a narrative that denies their primacy. Simultaneously it manifests and threatens the boundaries of the chronology that sustains the subject. For an author like Poe, trying to regress to the Real in order to create a new, unimposing chain ultimately leads him to drift at the edge of the world. Hawthorne finds he must negotiate and reinscribe himself onto the signifiers of his past on his own terms to sustain his identity. Melville, on the other hand, realizes the impossibility of such a task, illustrating that to lose one's subjectivity is simply to obliterate oneself in the process, to become absorbed as part of the object. All three of these author's personal narratives reflect larger American anxieties about its postcolonial past.

By the Twentieth Century, H. P. Lovecraft weaves that thread into a transhistorical tapestry of alterity. He finds a mythology that manifests the Real as a parapsychical



presence that exists as an integral part of both the postcolonial American Landscape and the postcolonial American narrative. In fact, he builds the “Cthulhu Mythos” on the foundations of Hawthorne’s Salem and Boston, Melville’s New York, and Poe’s Antarctic. In doing so, he creates an alternative symbolic that casts both America and England as places that are insignificant in the grand narrative of cosmic time.

Lovecraft’s consummation of a project begun by Irving a hundred and twenty years earlier ushers the Gothic from the postcolonial to the modern at a time when the globe would become increasingly smaller between the two world wars. Working within a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework that provides a point of engagement with narratives of American postcolonial experiences, the arc of this study moves through the Nineteenth Century, from Washington Irving to H. P. Lovecraft, focusing on the psychological angst of America’s condition as an emerging postcolonial nation.

Chapter Two, “Terra Incognita: Irving’s Sketches of Haunting,” examines the seeds of American Gothic writing by looking at Irving’s most famous stories, “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” in their original context of Irving’s *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819–1820). Reading the nested narration of what have come to be two of America’s favorite tales highlights the postcolonial anxieties of the young American nation. Irving narrativizes them in order to minimize the alienation of breaking with the history of a paternal Britain, stemming it with a lighthearted yet significant brush with uncanny edges of abjection. In so doing, he refocuses the anchor of American national identity in the topography of America itself, using the Dutch History of New York as a proxy paternal culture. Irving couches these tales in Crayon’s newly-postcolonial viewpoint, giving the narration a nationalistic

import. As a result, Sleepy Hollow and the Kaatskill Mountains come to represent more than just setting; they provide a legitimizing topography that asserts a cultural history of the landscape while obscuring that landscape's colonial past. Consequently, Irving transforms the topography into a psychotopography—an American mythos that reanchors young America's national narrative to landscape that predates British colonial rule while using the Dutch as a safety line.

The act does not completely eliminate the uncanny alienation brought on by a break with a paternal signifier, as "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" demonstrates, but it does temper the effect enough so that one can weather the feeling with a few exaggerated nervous laughs until it passes. Moreover, reanchoring (or as Irving puts it, "remembering") the nation's narrative with its physical landscape sets in motion not only a national mythos, but also a conflict of regional signifiers within the nation, personified by the New England character of Ichabod Crane and the New York presence of Brom Bones. These conflicts, though treated in a humorous style by Irving, eventually amplify to become anxieties in a second generation of American writers, as exemplified by Edgar Allan Poe.

Chapter Three, "The Brink of Eternity: Poe, Geography, and Antarctic Abjection," explores the how the geography of antebellum America affected Edgar Allan Poe on the level of personal narrativization. Among a second generation of American writers, the post-colonial status of the emergent nation led to conflicting self-perceptions between the North and the South. In Poe, whose multiple personal narratives were prescriptively anchored in these conflicting and multiple geographies, one sees the expression of and attempt to escape from the anxieties generated by systems of geographical signification.

On a personal level, Poe experiences the effects of a postcolonial psychology, and seeks to undermine the signifying chain that enables their perpetuation. Examining tales such as “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), “A Descent into the Maelström” (1841), and “The Imp of the Perverse” (1845), the chapter shows how Poe folds language over itself, initiating a return to the Lacanian Real—a return to the repressed kernel of subjectivity—in an effort to attack the prescriptive personal narratives which he could not fulfill and which continually alienated him.

Unlike Irving, Poe does not seek a new anchor for a national narrative. Rather, he simply sought a line of flight from his own personal narrativization, which for him confirmed the impossibility of viewing the geography of young America as anything but foreclosed. In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1837, 1838) and “MS. Found in a Bottle” (1833), Poe pushes his writing from the schizophrenic to the paranoiac by means of the abject in order to produce a “schizonoiac” expression of his frustrated identity. Using the anti-Oedipal models of Deleuze and Guattari to highlight Poe’s methods of attacking the determinism of the Symbolic chain, this chapter shows how he adopts the Antarctic as both an anti-geography and an anti-signifier, establishing an abject geography that accelerates narrative and pushes it to its representational limit.

Chapter Four, “Textual Projections: Hawthorne and New England Material History,” analyzes the manner in which Nathaniel Hawthorne confronts the intersection of both his personal and national genealogies. Like Poe, Hawthorne understood the rupture inherent in imagining the promise of America as an autonomous new Eden. This chapter investigates the subtle ways in which Hawthorne sought to narrativize himself as part of an unfolding history of both Salem and a young America that he perceived as

being prescriptively incipient rather than fully fated or totally unformulated. The American rejection of British and European authority left Hawthorne to look to his autocratic Puritan ancestors—whose sin of the Salem Witch Trials marked them as hauntingly unfit anchors for subjectivity yet ever present in the physical environment of Salem and Boston. Hawthorne negotiates this ambivalent historical terrain through a narrativizing of both the material landscape and himself as a presence in that landscape.

Using as the base of that narrative the physical objects themselves—the Salem Custom House, the scarlet piece of cloth, Gallows Hill, the Province House, and the Old South Church—Hawthorne obscures the boundaries of historical, psychological, and fictional narrative. He sets up his own uncanny psychotopography that pressures, but does not entirely threaten, subjectivity. Hawthorne’s “Custom House” introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), “Alice Doane’s Appeal” (1835), and “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (1832) in particular manifest his earlier expressions of those pressures, establishing a structure of counter-memory that would later become “The Legends of the Province House” (1838) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851).

Chapter Five, “Repossessing History: Hawthorne’s Houses and Gentleman’s Gothic,” continues to examine Hawthorne’s psychotopography in two specific texts, “The Legends of the Province House” (1838) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). Building on the arguments in Chapter Four of this study, Chapter Five shows how Hawthorne establishes a diegetic, non-chronological, ambivalent geography throughout his texts. One sees how Hawthorne textually wanders through the history of America, seeking out a typology to account for both a personal and national narrative, instead finding only fragmentary events of ambivalent signification. In “The Legends of the

Province House,” Hawthorne thematically continues where he left off with “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” bringing the Boston wanderer into the Province House and establishing it as a heterotopic space that disrupts a unity of narrative while acting as a conduit for history. The effect essentially turns history into legend, using material heirlooms inside the house such as Esther Dudley’s mirror, Edward Randolph’s portrait, and the main staircase and front door of the house itself. As Irving worked with the physical landscape of the Kaatskills, so Hawthorne works with the material attributes of his houses, but with a greater degree of irresolution and uncertainty.

Though not abject, the spaces of both the Province House and the House of the Seven Gables remain haunted. The reader experiences the pressures and thrill of a ghost story, yet never fully feels threatened by Hawthorne’s ghosts. Instead, their presence, embedded in the presence of the houses themselves, works through a narrative framing that safeguards the reader while Hawthorne copes with the narratives that comprise both his subjectivity and that of his nation. As a result, the narratives become open to subjective input from all three diegetic levels—the reader, Hawthorne, and the narrator. Opening up these houses to his audience, Hawthorne demonstrates how the American Gothic Romance serves as an ambivalent environment in which to traverse a conflicted postcolonial psychotopography.

Chapter Six, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Oneiric Oblivion in the New York of Melville’s *Pierre*,” considers the psychotopography of an abstracted and unnamed New York as Melville presents it in his 1852 novel, *Pierre, or the Ambiguities*. Melville reconceptualizes a patricidal narrative on the level of an imagined individual (and somewhat personal) history. In doing so, he uncannily structures the arc of that narrative

in a way that is homologous with Lacanian psychology, anticipating or at least refracting elements of Kristeva's abject in the disjunctive subjectivity of the title character of the novel. Consequently, the narrative shift from the pastoral Saddle Meadows to the labyrinthine cityscape of New York manifests almost allegorically a crisis inherent in such a break with paternal history. In Lacanian terms, Pierre expresses a grammatical ordering of the subject from which madness or subjective abeyance remain the only means of escape.

The geographically abstruse Church of the Apostles and its surrounding New York City become psychotopographies of erasure surrounding Pierre Glendinning with *oublieurs* instead of *souvenirs*. Melville presents the city as a structured but hollow oneiric signifier, one that becomes constructed from within his title character's own subjectivity as it begins to unravel to its foundations and echoing Pierre's self-conscious frustrations as it approaches the abject and oblivion.

Finally, Chapter Seven, "The Aeon-Silent Maze of Unhuman Masonry: Lovecraft's Other Places," delves into the serpiginous psychotopography of the "Cthulhu Mythos." Also considering himself an "outsider" like Poe and Hawthorne before him, Lovecraft faced a paradoxical self-narrativization. He viewed himself in a genealogical fashion, feeling more of a fraternal rather than a paternal relationship with his literary predecessors. Yet being a generation removed from the American Renaissance (born one year before Melville's death), Lovecraft also felt chronologically misplaced. He attacks the teleology inherent in genealogical thinking by hollowing it out. Through his tales, he builds on the psychotopographies created by both Hawthorne and Poe, eventually establishing a mythic parageography of northeastern America that excavates the Oedipal

dynamics and significations attached to postcolonial New England by exaggerating the timeline on which it bases its history.

Attacking both history and postcolonial significations in this manner, Lovecraft faces a complex task. Through the body of his tales, one sees how he establishes a diegetic geography similar to the one Hawthorne set up and then pushes it much farther into the grotesque. He rejected the literary influences of his time—Realism and Naturalism—feeling that the former was both too elitist and ordinary and that the latter was too deterministic. Instead, he creates a geography of the paraphysical; his demons are horribly real but not supernatural, while his materials are all grounded in a material or scientific reality. In tales such as “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” (1927), “The Outsider” (1921), “The Shunned House” (1924), “Pickman’s Model” (1926), “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1932), and “At the Mountains of Madness” (1931), Lovecraft formulates his psychotypography as multidimensional. He creates an entire subterranean landscape that runs underneath those established by Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. In so doing, he supports the existence of that geography, but destabilizes further its significance. Whereas in Irving and Hawthorne the paternal returns as a ghost, in Lovecraft the paternal comes back as a physically rotting corpse, or a pre-paternal demon.

These expressions give rise to a very specific thread of American Gothic that substantiates the scene of a return to the Real. Eric Savoy observes that “it is the very struggle to give the Real a language that singularly shapes the American Gothic as broadly symptomatic of cultural restlessness” (169). Yet Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville do not engage the Real simply to express their alienation. Rather, they strain towards it

in an attempt to shake off identities founded on a prescribed ideal that has already been foreclosed. They do not attempt to articulate the Real as much as they strive to generate a new symbolic from it, approaching the abject via the uncanny. As Deleuze and Guattari assert:

The repulsion of these machines, as found in the paranoiac machine of primary repression, gave way to an attraction in the miraculating machine. But the opposition between attraction and repulsion persists. It would seem that a genuine reconciliation of the two can take place only on the level of a new machine, functioning as “the return of the repressed.” (*Anti-Oedipus* 17)

Hence, a failed reterritorialization in the Real results in the uncanny or the abject, reflecting to varying degrees an eruption of the unconscious that threatens subjectivity and stresses its seams. As a result, one thread of the American Gothic exists as the expression of this continual and sustained assault on the subject in order to reshape it—a literary articulation of the threat history continually poses to the precarious state of early American identity.

#### Notes

1. In referencing the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real as interconnected registers of psychic life, this study requires some clarification of terms. Lacan refers to *the Symbolic* as a linguistic dimension that makes intersubjectivity possible (Dylan Evans 201). Of course, only after an initiation to the symbolic though the imposition of the paternal metaphor can subjectivity emerge as a result of signification. Yet, the Symbolic order is not limited to language. “The Symbolic is also the realm of radical alterity which Lacan refers to as the OTHER,” and the unconscious speaks for this alterity. The symbolic not only precipitates subjectivity, it also “is determinant of subjectivity” (202–203). *The Imaginary* exists as a second register, often counterbalanced by the Symbolic in tension against *the Real*, in which the subject forms and sustains a conception of himself a whole, a gestalt, with concepts of internal and external experience. “The principal illusions of the imaginary are those of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality, and above all, similarity” (82). Because the Imaginary is essentially a realm of ideal, it is also a register of alienation and therefore also initiates desire and lack that becomes articulated in the Symbolic. *The Real*, against which the previous two registers sustain subjectivity, “emerges as that which is outside language and inassimilable to symbolization (159). It is a psychic entelechy akin to a neo-natal state shattered by the intrusion of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and though it has “a character of impossibility,” the Real also encompasses an external reality, “a material substrate which



exists in itself, independently of any observer” (160). It is extra-symbolic, ante-symbolic, and para-imaginary. Because the Real resists signification, it also threatens subjectivity. Though one cannot, according to Lacan, regress to the Real from the Symbolic, one can approach it. Pushing towards the Real however begins to break down borders between subject and object, and thus can initiate what Kristeva terms abject—a heightened state of threatened or disintegrating subjectivity through slippage in signification and material experience.

2. As Buell astutely points out, “On the one hand, ‘postcolonial’ is from the start an objectionably reductive term since it coerces us to look at everything within the indigenous cultural field as old-world driven. On the other hand, American culture can be said to remain at least vestigially postcolonial as long as Americans are impressed by the sound of an educated British Accent—or (to take a more pertinent example) as long as D. H. Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature* remains an iconic text for American literary studies” (434).

CHAPTER 2  
TERRA INCOGNITA: IRVING'S SKETCHES OF HAUNTING

To speak of Washington Irving's status as a great American gothic writer among scholars of American literature invites contention. That he penned many gothic tales cannot be disputed, but critics consider his two most famous contributions to the American canon, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," to be too satirical or lightly told to be considered truly gothic. In part, those critics must be correct—the tales do not follow in the traditional European model established by Walpole and Radcliffe in the Eighteenth Century. Instead, they manipulate the rules set up by that model, and infuse them with a postcolonial psychology, amplifying the functions of time and geography while maintaining a pragmatic approach to the unexplainable. In an attempt to negotiate and map the cultural terrain between colonization and nationhood, Irving asserts a cultural history of the New York landscape that simultaneously obscures that landscape's colonial and patricidal past.

Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky observes that post-colonial Americans were "consciously apprehensive of radical changes and yet dissatisfied with their vague self image" (*Adrift* 79). Since "the European 'Past' . . . became to the besieged Americans an image of balance and stability" as Rubin-Dorsky argues, it seems that part of the "psychologically healing function" of that past stems from its legitimating capability. America, despite having rejected both the stability and legitimacy of the patriarchal British crown, found itself unsure of how to write its own narrative. Irving's two most famous tales seek a stability by subtly effacing the colonial past with a pleasantly gothic dreamy mountain

mist, and in doing so they encompass the literary balance necessary for future American gothic literature.

Still, imbedded in this new breed of American gothic literature, a threatening countercurrent of postcolonial consciousness remains as a grim reflection of the conflicted and divided nature of the emerging American identity. Without its colonizing father figure, American anxiety developed from a lack of legitimacy. Given that the European model of the Gothic relied on ruined castles, fallen aristocracy, and swooning women, Irving had no choice but to recast the genre to suit the new American landscape. European Gothic relied on historical constancy, which was the one thing that the young country felt it lacked. America did have a landscape, however. In a country with little to no “legitimated” history and certainly no long-ruined castles, Irving focuses on the landscape itself and the manner in which it becomes signified in the postcolonial experience. In the process, he lays a foundation of a distinct American gothic style that expresses the psychological interaction with real (that is material) surroundings and the alienation which prescribed narratives create for the subject who experiences them.

Understanding the part that “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” play in the emergence of American gothic style requires one first to consider with hindsight their place in the American literary canon. Out of the whole of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819–1820), only these two tales—the only two that establish a distinct American setting—have ingrained themselves firmly in American consciousness. Indeed, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” is arguably America’s favorite Halloween tale. Yet both tales have an undercurrent of alienation that acts as the driving force of the effect of the stories upon the reader. In describing the tale, Charles Neider

observes that “Rip Van Winkle,” “which itself often feels like a nightmare,” is “a story of the magical changes wrought by Time” (xxi).<sup>1</sup> Neider skirts the roots of the American postcolonial condition articulated in these stories when he states that Irving’s “native land . . . was short on hoary monuments and traditions as compared with the mother country, the country so recently rejected but that nevertheless was *his* and that haunted him” (xxii). Thus, Neider’s observations help to clarify the relationship time has to the foundations of an American Gothic.

Time, when viewed as the course of history, perpetuates postcolonial alienation because it recalls colonial dependence precisely at a time when one seeks a uniform historical narrative. Simultaneously it accentuates the postcolonial subject’s independence by its lack. In America’s case, wiping the historical slate clean with the Revolution simply left traces that make reading any new text more complicated. Without physical monuments such as the analogs of Otronto or Rackrent or Strawberry Hill to account for the new concept of American history, the ghosts of history had to come from the ground itself. Thus, Irving plants the seeds of the American nightmare in the geography of his native New York. Localizing his two most recognizable tales in villages rather than in a metropolis allows him to divorce the geography from a history of colonial commerce as well as establish the locale as a mythic heterotopia<sup>2</sup> that emblemizes the phantoms of the American postcolonial condition.

At the heart of this argument lies the assertion that antebellum American literature is indeed a postcolonial literature. As such, it operates within some of the psychological parameters of a nation emerging out from under its perceived paternal authority and re-imagining its identity as an autonomous one. Ignoring or dismissing this view of

American literature because of America's parallel expansionist practices is, as Lawrence Buell argues, "to perpetuate at the level of literary commentary the utopian fantasy of American literary autonomy cherished during the early national period, and to abet, in consequence, an American exceptionalist mentality that may without our fully realizing it reinforce in us . . . an insularity of perspective that is hazardously inaccurate" (415). Moreover, examining Irving's germinal texts in this manner allows one to separate intention from effect. One finds that Irving's texts, having been written under postcolonial socio-psychological stresses, result in refracting flickers of a burgeoning American gothic style rather than intentionally founding that style. Those flickering beams light up a search for an authentic or homogenous American past with no material objects—"no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins" as Henry James puts it (55)—to justify or legitimate its new existence. These "items of high civilization" signify both the legitimating historical narrative of Europe as well as the American national lack of that material foundation for historical legitimacy. What fills that lack, James observes, "what it is that remains—that is [the American's] secret" (56).

Given James's choice of words, one should keep in mind Freud's discussion of the concept of the Uncanny ("unheimlich") in which "two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight" ("Uncanny" 129). Freud notes that the definitions of "heimlich" (which is the root and supposed opposite of "unheimlich") mean "'familiar'; 'native', 'belonging to the home'" (124). Yet, "what is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*" (129). Irving's literary effect marks

the ways in which the native New Yorker becomes a stranger in his own land. At the same time, that effect makes the land itself the guardian of an inaccessible knowledge that acts as an historical narrative. Diedrich Knickerbocker seeks in New York what Geoffrey Crayon seeks in England. Yet, somehow Crayon's quest remains incomplete, which may be why he must defer to Knickerbocker's acumen to fill out his sketch book. Knickerbocker's found "papers" may be just as incomplete, but in such a way as to avoid inspiring a sense of lack. Indeed, they appear to invite the reader rather than emphasize his remove from the land or his lack of national history.

As Crayon explains in the *Sketch Book*, America "was full of youthful promise: Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle" (Irving, *Sketch Book* 2). Thus, the abstract concepts of time and history take on dimensional mass in the "mouldering stones" of Europe's ruins. Already, Irving's narrator has begun to characterize his encounter with history in terms of a lack, going so far as to state that by traveling to Europe he wished to see "the gigantic race from which [he] was degenerated" (3). Crayon sees himself neither as fully American nor as fully English. Instead he is a jumble of insufficiencies, since, as O. R. Dathorne argues,

locating past American experience must, of necessity, begin with an examination of negatives. For, from the country's inception, . . . definitions of being an American require an admission of colonial historical legacy. Independence is itself dependent on the "positive" attributes of the conqueror, whose offspring the colony is. (1)

Essentially, then, Geoffrey Crayon is a dispossessed American, which is why the *Sketch Book* serves as an example of nascent American postcolonial literary self-consciousness. Irving sets up his fictional narrator as one who seeks an experiential history embodied and relived in a sense of place and material presence. In contrast, Knickerbocker

explores his own land, and acts as a catalyst for the reader to seek the same history in the imminency of immanent physical encounters.

In his “Account of Himself” (Chapter 1), Crayon tells his reader that he “was always fond of visiting new scenes, and observing strange characters and manners” as if manners, strange characters, and the new scenes were all intertwined in a causal relationship (Irving, *Sketch Book* 1). He makes “tours of discovery into foreign parts and unknown regions,” and he becomes “familiar with all its places famous in history or fable. I knew every spot where a murder or robbery had been committed, or a ghost seen.” Such research indicates that Crayon is truly trying to account for his presence.

The fictional author has a fascination with visiting real historical places tinted with unreality because the fantastic element attached to them allows him imaginative access to their deeper significance. That is, his sense of historical space encompasses a fantastic history as well as a real one, but both types of history are directly grounded in a physical geography to which Crayon can stake a small claim. Consequently, the physical place itself becomes the grounding center for legitimating narratives, rather than having a paternalistic authority authenticate them. As a dispossessed American, Crayon enjoys the freedom of immanent experiential title—if the physical place is all that is required to legitimate narrative, be it historical, fantastic, or both (“legend”), then all narratives become valid. No matter where he goes, Crayon can impose his narrative on the place, and not the other way around.

That freedom, however, is the by-product of a postcolonial consciousness, and therefore also becomes a source of alienation. Though Dathorne does argue that “Americans see the European past in ways through which they can mythicize it,” he is

inaccurate to assert that “their conception need have no basis in reality” (14). Crayon uses the reality around him to create his narratives, even when he is at sea. In “The Voyage” (Chapter 2), Crayon even couches the ocean in narrative terms, noting how the “vast space of waters that separates the hemispheres is like a blank page in existence” (Irving, *Sketch Book*, 4). Crayon relishes the voyage because he faces another opportunity in which to recast his own history as he watches “the last blue line of [his] native country fade away in the horizon” (5). Yet that ocean is also “a gulf, *not merely imaginary, but real*, between us and our homes,—a gulf subject to tempest, and fear, and uncertainty, rendering distance palpable, and return precarious” (emphasis added). Hence, the reality of the ocean also acts as a catalyst for claim-staking, since Crayon tells his reader how his “imagination would conjure up all that I had heard or read of the watery world beneath me,” fashioning an experiential possession using stories of “shapeless monsters that lurk among the very foundations of the earth; and of those wild phantasms that swell the tales of fisherman and sailors” (6). Predating Melville’s Ishmael by three decades, Crayon contains the shoots of the American postcolonial nomadic character. Like Crayon, Ishmael is “tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 7). Both characters, it seems, are similarly adrift in their identities.

Yet as “the great shroud of the sea [rolls] on as it did five thousand years ago” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 572), so the ocean becomes for Crayon the field of the paradox of historical reality—it is both the container of all time as well as its destroyer. That is why the “spectre” of a shark darts below its surfaces, and it is populated by “shapeless monsters that lurk” and “wild phantasms” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 6). In truth, the language



Irving uses to express Crayon's sensations intimate a non-specific, but very threatening gothic atmosphere. That gothic atmosphere comes to uncanny fruition when Crayon views "some shapeless object drifting at a distance." The implied undercurrent of the narrative is the unspoken mirroring effect this "shapeless object" has. It recalls the "shapeless monsters that lurk" and the fact that viewed from the same distance, Crayon himself must be a shapeless object. Skillfully, Irving quickly diffuses the looming surface tension of this moment while retaining its parallel gothic undercurrent. The object "proved to be the mast of a ship that must have been completely wrecked." In the same sentence, Irving's grammatical construction confirms an object but undermines its history. Using the present perfect "have been" with the auxiliary verb "must" situates the object in an indistinct past while leaving its fate speculative. Therefore one cannot prove that the ship was wrecked, one can only assume it. Moreover, the passive construction of the ship's assumed fate leaves a menacing gap where the acting subject should be—what wrecked the ship?

In this fashion, the ocean functions as a heterotopic space for Crayon's postcolonial psychology. The mirroring effect that the ocean creates functions both horizontally and vertically. Foucault discusses this reflective aspect of heterotopias in relation to the mirror. The mirror is a "placeless place . . . [wherein] I see myself where where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent" ("Of Other" 24). Yet the mirror "does exist in reality" and so "it makes the place I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there." For

Crayon, the wrecked mast couples with the “watery world beneath me” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 6) to determine his position, constructing what Victoria Nelson terms his “psychotopography” (110–111). Hence the objects and their perception by the subject “[reverberate] at the point of coincidence; not only is external reality made to stand for internal reality, but behind both is posited a deeper transcendental reality” (110). In Crayon’s case, rather than the objects being projected out from within, they seem to impact the subject’s encounter with that reality.

Of the wrecked ship’s narrative, only the physical objects remain, and for Crayon that is enough upon which to speculate. He notes that “The wreck had evidently drifted about for many months” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 7). Again, the use of the word “evidently” grounds the narrative in the physical objects, in the evidence available, while keeping the facts uncertain. Thus, the “remains of handkerchiefs” exemplify the life and death struggle of sailors lashing themselves to “this spar” (6). “Clusters of shell-fish” and “long sea-weeds” embody the time this floating gravesite has existed. Crayon’s speculative narratives sprung from these physical objects lead him to consider the absence of human remains—“their bones lie whitening among the caverns of the deep” (7), perhaps to become food for the “shapeless monsters.” In fact, Crayon laments that “not one memento may ever return for love to cherish.” Because of the lack of such “mementos” (a term that embodies the past in the physical), “expectation darkened into anxiety—anxiety into dread—and dread into despair!” Consequently, this one unresolved discovery “gave rise to many dismal anecdotes.” Irving’s use of “anecdote” instead of “tale” or “story” implies a temporally self-contained, personal, unauthenticated history. In addition, Crayon hears these “anecdotes” while sitting “round the dull light of

a lamp in the cabin, that made the gloom more ghastly.” The telling of anecdotes cannot remove the anxiety, dread, and despair caused by the presence of the wrecked mast because as Crayon himself observes, “Silence, oblivion, like the waves, have closed over them, and no one can tell the story of their end.”

The experience of Irving’s narrator approaches abjection, as Julia Kristeva conceptualizes it:

A wound with blood and pus . . . does not *signify* death. . . . refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. . . . There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. . . . The border has become an object. . . . It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (4)

Irving does not allow his narrator to be engulfed, but rather allows him a brief encounter with possible oblivion. Crayon’s defense is once again to create a narrative buffer for what he has experienced, to account for the horror, which is why he must narratively lash himself to the short anecdote “related by the captain” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 8). Crayon cannot fully account for the encounter with the wrecked ship, and so he therefore must interpose an anecdotal distance between himself and it. In turn, the captain’s account of the small schooner provides a much-needed bulwark for the reader of Crayon’s narration. Yet, at the heart of the captain’s tale, that experience of brief abjection remains embedded, and it is just enough to haunt the captain, Crayon, and the reader. “I heard their drowning cry mingling with the wind. The blast that bore it to our ears swept us out of all farther hearing. I shall never forget that cry!” The encounter of the wrecked mast psychologically removes all barriers between the utopia of Crayon’s ship and the heterotopic potential of the ocean. Thus the narrator’s experience moves from the “heimlich” to “unheimlich,” from security to aporia. There is nothing to keep the world

of the ship from mingling with the “watery world beneath” where “shapeless monsters” lurk (6).

The brief brush of abjection that Crayon experiences, no matter how many narrative buffers he creates for it, remains to haunt him and continues to reproject itself onto the narrator’s experiences. As the weather worsens, Crayon describes how “The whistling of the wind through the rigging sounded like funereal wailings” and how “it seemed as if death were raging round this floating prison, seeking for his prey” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 9). The mirroring effect of the wrecked mast has come round, and the specter of the assumed fate of the unknown sailors who lashed themselves to it haunts Crayon. It is almost as if Crayon hears not only the cries of the men of the ill-fated ship in the wind, but also the cries of all sailors who have been lost at sea. Jeffery Rubin-Dorsky comments that Crayon’s “self-conscious” fears reveal “Irving’s own terror of being, both realistically and metaphorically, lost forever between two shores” (“Washington” 511). Though Crayon’s remarks about the mast, the lost sailors, and the raging storm might appear exaggerated and melodramatic, these traits of the narration manifest a nervous laughter in an attempt to mask a self-conscious fear and are yet another attempt to stem the encounter with abjection.

Whether or not Irving shared these fears, they emanate from an encounter with a material object onto which Crayon has projected an uncertain narrative in order to bar an encounter with abjection. That narrative in turn, because of its uncertainty, haunts Crayon’s self-conscious efforts to account for himself. To be “lost forever between two shores” in the literal sense would mean that there would be no “memento” to account for his existence, no evidence of his narrative, no gravestone, and he would be obliterated.

Underneath that, and yet parallel with it because of the persistence of physical remains, is Crayon's postcolonial fear of losing one's place forever. When someone dies on shore, they are buried or entombed. When they die in the sea, they are "lost."

This feeling remains a part of Crayon's self-consciousness even after his fears have subsided with the return of good weather. As he approaches the English shore he notices the "mouldering ruin of an abbey overrun with ivy" as well as "the taper spire of a village church" among other structures that "were characteristic of England" (Irving, *Sketch Book* 10). Though the dread has subsided, the mechanics of the psychological process remain in place. Crayon has yet to encounter these objects up close, and because of that he cannot anchor them to any specific narrative and therefore remains unsure of his relationship to them. Laura Murray refers to this process as "figurative possession and imaginative ownership" (216), but those terms seem too abstract and not grounded in encountering the actual material object. Moreover, the temporary experiential claim Crayon enjoys through chronicling objects and spots can go awry, and create haunting alienating narratives that emphasize one's own state of dispossession. Such times are like Crayon's fears on his voyage, Rip Van Winkle's return to his village, or Ichabod Crane's night ride through the hollow. Indeed, as he steps off the boat, the narrator begins to feel his own dispossession: "I alone was solitary and idle. I had no friend to meet, no cheering to receive. I stepped upon the land of my forefathers—but felt that I was a stranger in the land" (Irving, *Sketch Book* 11). Crayon is both on the land and in it, and yet cannot account for his presence there.

Perhaps Crayon's alienation stems from the fact that, as Benedict Anderson points out, "The Declaration of Independence of 1776 makes absolutely no reference to

Christopher Columbus, Roanoke, or the Pilgrim Fathers, nor are the grounds put forward to justify independence in any way ‘historical,’ in the sense of highlighting the antiquity of the American people” (193). But if “a radical break with the past was occurring,” as Anderson argues, then Crayon is an example of the American trying to patch that break. He is an American, but has no reference to history to account for himself; he has access to the material history to justify his English patrimony, but he is himself not English. Negotiating this terrain must therefore become an exercise in narration. Even the narrator’s name, “Crayon,” signifies “pencil” in French, signaling his role in writing the American historical consciousness into being. Anderson argues that the materiality of the past “simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* . . . which, because it cannot be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated” (204). Thus, Irving’s narrator must continually reinsert himself into the history manifested by the material objects he encounters.

“Stratford-on-Avon” (Chapter 27) amplifies this trait of post-colonial American character in a more pleasant way. In visiting Shakespeare’s home, Crayon does more than make a “poetical pilgrimage” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 265); he faces what Dathorne terms “the mirror image of the metropolis” (1). Once more, the narrator encounters history somehow embedded in material objects and the imagined narratives:

There was the shattered stock of the very matchlock with which Shakespeare shot the deer. . . . There, too, was his tobacco box; which proves he was a rival smoker of Sir Walter Raleigh; the sword also with which he played Hamlet . . . (Irving, *Sketch Book* 265)

But the pilgrims remake the history through their encounters with its physical manifestation, exemplified by Crayon’s observation of Shakespeare’s chair. Visitors to

the house sit in his chair (another object that Crayon imaginatively narrates), yet as a result of their sitting, “the chair had to be new bottomed at least once in three years” (266). Hence, the pilgrims remake the relic into one that is part history and part present, with their impress upon it, and as a result incorporate themselves into the narrative of Shakespeare’s chair.

Crayon defends this practice by stating that he is “ever willing to be deceived, where the deceit is pleasant and costs nothing. I am therefore a ready believer in relics, legends, and local anecdotes of goblins and great men. . . . What is it to us, whether these stories be true or false, so long as we can persuade ourselves into the belief of them, and enjoy all the charm of the reality?” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 266). Yet suspending one’s belief is not always pleasant and free. Crayon’s outlook is tinted by his views expressed in “English Writers of America” (Chapter 6), when he recognizes that “there are feelings dearer than interest—closer to the heart than pride—that will still make us cast back a look of regret, as we wander farther and farther from the paternal roof, and lament the waywardness of the parent that would repel the affections of the child” (55). Crayon’s couching the postcolonial American mindset in paternal terms gives the reader an avenue into the mechanics of his psychological state.

Crayon seems to be negotiating what Lacan terms a denial or negation of the paternal metaphor acting as the “*point de capiton*,” or “anchoring point” of the signifying chain (“On a question” 190; “Subversion” 291). This negation or denial (“*Verneinung*”) causes, in the case of foreclosure (“*Verwerfung*”), “At the point at which the Name-of-the-Father is summoned . . . a pure and simple hole may thus answer in the Other; due to the lack of the metaphoric effect, this hole will give rise to a corresponding hole in the

place of phallic signification” (“On a question” 190). Crayon’s position is far from being one of foreclosure. Rather, his is a paternal metaphor in transition, a negotiation of negation—”the owning [aveu] of the very signifier that *Verneinung* annuls.” Simply put, in Crayon’s case, he narratively latches on to the material objects that embody a rejected paternal history in order to compensate for the void that rejection has produced and to curb the onset of abjection. This process is only “pleasant and costs nothing” when he can do so with his own narrative, thus controlling how he can account for himself. When he was at sea, “cast loose from the secure anchorage” and the “lengthening chain” that holds him, Crayon loses control of his narrative abilities, cannot trace time, and drifts frighteningly close to the edges of abjection. The phallic presence of the wrecked mast then comes to embody more than just a haunting mortal fate; it also signifies exactly how dangerously close to the edge of abjection Crayon himself approached.

The main characters of “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (Chapters 5 and 33) encounter this loss of control. While the chain of narration keeps the reader anchored, the characters drift. Though Crayon is the narrator of the *Sketch Book*, both of these chapters come from and are “found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker, an old gentleman of New York” (Irving, “Rip” 1). Much like the wrecked mast, these are “found” texts, yet one can assume that their inclusion in the *Sketch Book* is an editorial choice both of Irving and Crayon—Irving because he is the ultimate author of all the texts, and Crayon because it is his sketch book. This editorial chain requires one not just to consider the two tales in the context of the *Sketch Book*, as Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky rightly argues (“Value” 393–394), but also to examine the



individual links in the narrative chain, how they relate, and what effect they have on the reader.

As Rubin-Dorsky points out, “Irving, it seems, has gone to considerable lengths to make it explicit that Crayon is not passing off these stories as his own or claiming to have seen or witnessed in any way the events related within them” (“Value” 393). Still, he argues, “their ultimate significance may very well lie in the fact that they tend to reflect back on him anyway” (394). Indeed, the reader faces a book written by Irving, but supposedly penned (narrated) by the fictional Geoffrey Crayon, Esq., who in turn has collected these “found” tales among the papers of the late (but still fictional) Diedrich Knickerbocker, who in turn has collected these tales from the New York region. Ultimately, then, Irving presents these particular tales so that they have no traceable author, and as such, appear to spring from the very lands in which they take place, which, despite their fictional authors, are very real. Michael Warner describes this chain as seeking “not more history but antiquity, a folk temporality” (791). That point aside, Knickerbocker as a character was already legendary—part reality, part fiction. Irving ran publicity notices in the New York *Evening Post* in the Autumn of 1809 declaring Mr. Knickerbocker a missing person, and then detailing the circumstances of the publication of the *History of New York* as a means to pay off his debts. Indeed, that text too is a found work, ostensibly “found in the chamber of Mr. Diedrich Knickerbocker, the old gentleman whose sudden and mysterious disappearance has been noticed” (Irving, *Diedrich* x).

These found texts by a lost author (who by the third printing in 1819 had since been found and then died, making him lost once more) bring with them a distinctly American

mythos. But the anchor of that mythos is the landscape of New York itself, and consequently Irving creates a legitimating topos for a narrative that is arguably not an effort to stem abjection, but rather an expression of the alienating potential of negation's effect and the psychotopography it sustains. Irving effectively narrativizes a specific American postcolonial mindset as it struggles to establish itself in an historical continuum. Though elements of postcolonial alienation remain in the tales, Irving, writing as Knickerbocker, centers the history of New York not as starting with the colonial expansion, but with the land itself. The first three chapters of the *History* discuss the theories of creation and location of the world (and consequently New York). Chapter 5 of the *History* humorously refutes Europe's claim to the land by "discovery." In short, Knickerbocker does not recognize England as a paternal authority, and therefore does not have the same postcolonial mindset as Crayon.

Unlike the Declaration of Independence, the character of Knickerbocker, "an old gentleman of New York" (Irving, "Rip" 1), and his collected tales do put forth the grounds to justify independence in historical terms and highlight the antiquity of the American people. Since the tales themselves have no prime author, but are directly grounded in the folk unconscious of the landscape, Irving's construction establishes the landscape itself as the source of American character. There remains in the stories, however, enough of the fantastic so that the tales remain open to the traveler, and therefore any American can stake a small claim in the imaginative priority of the Kaatskills or Sleepy Hollow, just as Geoffrey Crayon can sit in Shakespeare's chair.

Perhaps that is why "Rip Van Winkle," after a brief introductory note about Knickerbocker, begins with the statement, "Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson

must remember the Kaatskill mountains” (2). Even this opening line of the story implies a temporal ambiguity. It has a tone of recollecting the past, as well as of issuing an imperative to future visitors of the mountains. In fact, Irving’s use of the auxiliary verb “must” fulfills Todorov’s observation that the stylistic elements of the imperfect tense and modalization lie at the heart of narrating the fantastic (Todorov 38). This effect, what Haskell Springer terms “creative contradictions,” does not allow the reader “to regard this sketch as either history or fairy tale; rather, it exists in a middle ground” (14–15). This middle ground manifests a psychotopography that the reader can experience for himself or herself in reality. Irving’s word choice marks an ambiguous necessity that enables possible diegetic transgression.

The narration then moves on to the landscape of the Kaatskills, describing them as a “dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family” which swell “up to a noble height, lording it over the surrounding country” (Irving, “Rip” 2). “Clothed in blue and purple,” the mountains sometimes even wear a “crown of glory.” Though America may not have an aristocracy, the physical landscape rivals any great royal family of Europe, and therefore becomes a legitimating authority for the narratives that spring from it. Irving’s description of the Kaatskills as “dismembered” also carries with it the implication of castration. Considered in Lacanian terms, the phallus represents the subject’s desire for the desire of the (m)other. The location of the tale embodies both the psychological lack of the alienated subject as well as a legitimating fertility/authority despite that lack. This idea only reinforces the postcolonial need of “re-membering” the Kaatskills both in a temporal and psychological manner. That act begins with the narrativization of the landscape and the American subject.

Rip himself lives in “a little village, of great antiquity” at the “foot of these fairy mountains” where his “ancestors” also lived (Irving, “Rip” 2). Though vague, there is an approximate timeline that anchors the narrative, but only just enough to allow it to move with the tide of narration. Rip’s village was “founded . . . in the early times of the province, just about the beginning of the government of the good Peter Stuyvesant,” which would place the date around 1650. The tale was published in 1819, and Rip himself slept for twenty years; falling asleep before the American Revolution and waking up after it in the United States place his slumber somewhere between 1765 and 1785.

That the timeline exists and yet still remains vague fortifies the fantastic element of the story. Todorov notes that the “fantastic therefore implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader’s own ambiguous perception of the events narrated” (31). The reader can anchor the landscape in an historical past while still experiencing it in the present. Moreover, the timeline becomes more ambiguous the farther back in history one goes. Consequently, though the reader may come after Knickerbocker, who in turn has come after Rip Van Winkle, who in turn has come after his ancestors, who have come after Hudson, the “Indians” of the Kaatskills came before him (Irving, “Rip” 15). Yet, according to the “Postscript,” the mountains “have *always* been a region full of fable” implying that they are also the “abode of spirits” (emphasis added). Thus, the timeline fades back into “always” rather than beginning with Hudson and colonization, and it ends with the reader rather than Rip or Knickerbocker. As a result, the fantastic element remains open and revitalized with every reading and the reality of the location opens a potential diegetic gateway. The

story of Rip may be contained within a vague historical period, but the fantastic conditions that lead to Rip's encounter are not.

The opinion of "old Peter Vanderdonk," the "most ancient inhabitant of the village" but not of the Kaatskills, confirms the possibility of encountering Hudson's ghost not just for Rip, but for any visitor to the region:

it was affirmed that the great Hendrick Hudson, the first discoverer of the river and country, kept a kind of vigil there every twenty years, with his crew of the *Half-moon*; being permitted in this way to revisit the scenes of his enterprise, and keep a guardian eye upon the river and city called by his name. . . . His father had seen them in their old Dutch dresses playing at ninepins in a hollow of the mountain . . . . (Irving, "Rip" 13)

Hence, Rip is not the only one to have encountered the spirits of Hudson and his crew. Vanderdonk's father had seen them, and the whole village had heard them and hears them still, according to Knickerbocker, playing at ninepins in the hollow of the hills. Hudson and his crew are, in a sense, remembered by the landscape through a parallel temporality and field of knowledge.

The fact that at the same time the "strange figure" appears Rip hears "a voice from a distance, hallooing" his name imparts an uncanny ambiguity as to the voice's physical and temporal source. The voice seems to be from both a temporal and physical distance, while coming from both the landscape and the figure (Irving, "Rip" 6). Irving pens the story so that the reader, who is physically able to visit this region, may think not only of Rip, but of their potential encounter with Hudson and his crew, since their spirits appear to exist outside the timeline, in a time of "always." In this manner "Rip Van Winkle" becomes a true ghost story rather than just being a story about a ghost. It aims to haunt the reader should that reader encounter the physical geography from which it flowed.

Perhaps the uncanniest moment in the tale comes when Rip re-enters his village after waking up. “As he approached the village he met a number of people, but none whom he knew,” and this alienating experience forces Rip to reconsider his sense of self (Irving, “Rip” 13). As the village “all stared at him,” the “strange children ran at his heels, hooting after him,” and the dogs “barked at him as he passed.” Though Rip is on the very soil of his origin, he is geographically alienated because he is in a different country and, like Crayon, cannot account for his presence there. Indeed, “Strange names were over the doors—strange faces at the windows—everything was strange.” Given this encounter, Rip skirts the uncanny edges of abjection, considering how “His mind now misgave him; he began to doubt whether both he and the world around him were not bewitched.” Rip is adrift in his own village, finding his house “with some difficulty” and seeing that it has rotted—“roof fallen in, the windows shattered, and the doors off the hinges.” Rip experiences what Freud terms “unheimlich”—the effacement of “the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality” (“Uncanny” 152).

This effacement appears to be the effect of a brief taste of oblivion, or being out of time. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud discusses “a peculiar feeling” which is a “sensation of *eternity*, a feeling of something limitless, unbounded, something ‘oceanic’ . . . a feeling of indissoluble connection, of belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole” (1–2). Though Freud himself does not believe in the “primary nature of such a feeling,” he cannot “deny that it in fact occurs in other people.” He proposes that this feeling remains to varying degrees in each person as a “shrunk vestige of a far more extensive feeling—a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable

connection of the ego with the external world” that existed before the “ego [detached] itself from the external world” (4). Freud’s somewhat ambiguous and individualized conclusion sounds very much like a unformed description of Lacan’s mirror stage, where the subject breaks off and enters the Symbolic. That “oceanic” feeling then, would approach an experience of the Real.

This psychological experience becomes complicated when manifest in material experience. Freud points out that “If we try to represent historical sequence in spatial terms, it can only be done by juxtaposition in space; the same space will not hold two contents” (*Civilization* 6). With Rip, the space he knows does not fit the space he experiences, and though not gothic, that experience certainly qualifies as uncanny, especially since for Rip his home is not his home. Irving does not maintain this discomfort for too long in the narration—it only lasts as long as Rip has lost track of time. What seems most unsettling for Rip is the fact that analogs of his previous world remain, yet, these elements have now taken on an inauspicious character. They mimic themselves, and without the anchor of narrative time, the slippage increases in Rip’s experience. Thus, “a half-starved dog that looked like Wolf was skulking” around the ruins of his house, snarling and showing his teeth” (Irving, “Rip” 10). The village inn has become the Union Hotel (complete with the “metamorphosed” image of Washington), the great tree has become a “tall naked pole.”

These physical objects apparently occupy the same space, and Rip feels their alienating disjointed effects to the point where they attack his own identity. When he is shown who is later revealed to be his son, Rip’s sense of narrative identity breaks down. He sees “a precise counterpart of himself, as he went up the mountain. . . . He doubted his

own identity, and whether he himself was another man” (Irving, “Rip” 12). Moreover, Rip has a third counterpart in the crowd in the form of his namesake grandson. This moment, uncanny without the explanatory element of a homogenous history, juxtaposes Rip in time at the same place—child Rip, young Rip, and elder Rip. In contrast, when Rip’s age remains the same, his historical location changes. Rip moves through time just as time moves around him. Rip is out of place when he returns to the village, but in the Kaatskills, he is out of time. In this location Wolf “bristled up his back, and giving a low growl, skulked to his master’s side, looking fearfully down the glen,” and Rip feels “a vague apprehension stealing over him” as the “strange figure” of the Hudson’s crew member approaches him (Irving, “Rip” 6). This moment prefigures Rip’s return to the village in much the same way, except that the difference is historical.

The narration remains unclear as to which direction time flows at this moment, even if Peter Vanderdonk asserts that the past had imposed itself on the present. From the narrative standpoint, time can flow either way, since the physical mountain itself remains the only constant, as if it were a conduit of history. Either way, Rip embodies one facet of the alienating postcolonial experience. He encounters the pre-colonial landscape as Hudson experienced it, remembers that landscape as he lived in it, and then settles in the new land of the United States as a “chronicle of the old times ‘before the war’” (Irving, “Rip” 14). Once the narrative time of Rip’s experience becomes fixed again, the uncanny element of the narration fades. Yet even though Rip can explain his experience, since he “used to tell his story to every stranger” that came to the village, that explanation can account only for the time lost, not the manner in which it was lost. At no point in the narration does the tale speculate on what was in “Rip Winkle’s flagon” or



how Hudson's crew manifests itself in the Kaatskills. Thus, though readers experience a certain closure of Rip's experience, whose perspective they have had through the tale, they do not experience closure for themselves. In fact, since the possibility exists that Rip has gone back in time to encounter the past in the Kaatskills, that possibility remains open in a new chapter for readers of the tale. Now, as a combined result of a fantastically ambiguous narrative centered in the slippage of time and the physical presence of the space of that narrative, the possibility remains that the reader, Rip, and Hudson's crew may all occupy the same space at the same time. As a result, Rip has become just as much a part of the landscape as Hudson.

Michael Warner notes that in the summer of 1835, during a tour of the Kaaterskill Falls, Irving was told "that he was witnessing the authentic haunts of Rip Van Winkle" (793). This one fact indicates the apparitional effect Irving's tale had on how antebellum America envisioned the New York landscape. While Rip had encountered Hudson, the rest of America could seek out Rip while still hearing Hudson playing at ninepins with his crew. Irving's geographically centered story established the grounds in which an emerging postcolonial nation might anchor a national historical narrative chain. Rubin-Dorsky points out that "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" both "reinforce the belief that it was fiction itself, rather than any of the illusions that Crayon invented and then sought to perpetuate, that served as Irving's compensation for the loss of, and the failure to make connections to, the past" ("Value" 405). Though Rubin-Dorsky's insights place Irving's motivation as personal rather than national, they help to illuminate how the tales augment America's perceived lack of a legitimate historical

conformity based in urban and architectural spaces as they refract the inherent conflicts of that lack.

Rip loses twenty years—a generation’s worth of history—and his resulting bewilderment and schizophrenia becomes quintessentially gothic. Homi Bhabha describes this type of encounter as “the unhomely moment” (“Introduction” 9).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Rip does undergo the condition of being “‘in the beyond’ . . . to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; . . . *to touch the future on its hither side.*”<sup>4</sup> The reader, given the fact that the Kaatskill Mountains still exist and that the physical sense of place remains the one link to antiquity in the narrative, can translate that experience to a national one. Hence Rubin-Dorsky’s observations about Irving’s personal anxieties translate well to the national scale, but only if one takes into account the threatening gothic experience, however brief, embedded in the narrative. Bhabha perhaps accounts for this translation when he notes the “unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (11). Yet it is in the narrative filtering—the telling and listening of that moment—that one “must attempt to realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (12). For both Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane, that past literally “creeps up on [them] stealthily as your own shadow . . . forcing upon [the reader] a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9).

Irving’s negotiation of this narrative historical terrain progresses and refines itself with “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” The tale not only encompasses the lingering penumbra of America’s colonial history, it also adumbrates the geographical identity

crisis that past initiates as the new country begins to grow. Irving uses a vague (albeit physically real) topography in “Rip Van Winkle,” but Sleepy Hollow acts as more of a tangibly specific location in which to anchor the recovery of American history. In this little village north of Tarrytown, New York, Irving articulates a psychic heterotopia for the expression of the American postcolonial condition. Foucault argues “the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (“Of Other” 25).<sup>5</sup> Sleepy Hollow becomes a focal point where New York Dutch, British colonial, New England Puritan (Yankee), and postcolonial American histories all converge. The significance of the space it occupies becomes apparent in its name—in order for it to accommodate the ambivalent histories, Irving must make it hollow. Even when Rip encounters Hudson’s crew, he passes “through the ravine, [where] they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheatre” (Irving, “Rip” 7). Sleepy Hollow may seem like “one of the quietest places in the whole world”, but the narrator of the tale also indicates that it is capable of producing “prolonged” and reverberating “angry echoes” (Irving, “Legend” 31). For all of its homely appearance, it also carries an aspect of the fugitive with it as well. The denizens of Sleepy Hollow “frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air” (32).

The “whole neighborhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions . . . and the nightmare, with her whole ninefold, seems to make it the favorite scene of her gambols” (Irving, “Legend” 32). Sleepy Hollow is a contrary space, a “by-place of nature”; while a viciously haunted “region of shadows,” it still remains “peaceful,” and “listless” (32–33). The Hollow’s “bewitching power” appears to spring forth from “the early days of the settlement” and even “before the country was discovered

by Master Hendrick Hudson.” In addition, the fact that the land itself is “sleepy” imparts a certain atemporality of the unconscious to the atmosphere of the landscape. Irving grants Sleepy Hollow the same historical foundation, if not deeper one, as Rip’s geographical haunts. Again, the narrative anchors itself in the material landscape. Irving constructs “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” as a tale found and included in the *Sketch Book* by Geoffrey Crayon, but penned by Diedrich Knickerbocker, told by “a pleasant, shabby, gentlemanly old fellow, in pepper-and-salt clothes, with a sadly humorous face” who, after telling the story, admits ““I don’t believe one half of it myself” (55–56). The teller himself is a bundle of ambiguity. His deceptively direct statement about his belief begins to undermine any truth a reader could seek to extract from the story.<sup>6</sup> He never indicates specifically which “half” he does not believe. Though the reader might take his statement to mean that he does not believe *even* one half of the tale, that is not what he says. Thus, the statement of not believing one half leaves open the possibility for believing *at least* one half.

In the same way, both Haskell Springer and Jeffery Rubin-Dorsky have pointed out the multiple implications of the title of the tale. The “legend” may refer to “the misadventures of Ichabod Crane,” to the fact that Ichabod’s story is “legendary to the drowsy people of Sleepy Hollow,” to “the old legend of the headless Hessian which [Ichabod] heard from the residents of Sleepy Hollow” (Springer 17), or even to “insist that the ‘legend’ is Sleepy Hollow itself” (Rubin-Dorsky, “Value” 404).<sup>7</sup> That the legend refers to the place itself makes sense, not for the reasons that Rubin-Dorsky argues, but because of its actual geographic existence in New York. Haskell Springer observes that “Legend, moreover, has a stronger, even radical influence . . . by its ability to recreate

itself in reality. . . . [the action of Brom Bones] attests to the material influence of imagination on actuality” (17). Whether or not Bones did play a joke on Crane, the entire world of the tales remains as a reality one may encounter. The word “legend” connotes perpetuation, therefore the physical existence of the town keeps the legend alive for its readers. Whether or not they actually visit the town is also not an issue; the possibility of being able to do so, to walk among the gravestones of the Old Dutch Church and see the Sleepy Hollow bridge, allows the reader a narrative portal into this manifestation of a heterotopic psychotopography. As a result, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” becomes a part of a postcolonial American chronology. In this way, the title comes to mean “Sleepy Hollow: The Legend.”

The availability of a diegetic fissure in the tale serves as a narrational necessity if Sleepy Hollow is to become a legitimating repository of American postcolonial angst. Irving was aware of the effect of his tales on the geography it reflected, and by May 1839 published his essay “Sleepy Hollow” in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* to defend its reality. Ironically, he defends the reality of the place using the same fictional persona of Geoffrey Crayon, offering both a defense of the place as well as another component in its narrativization. In fact, during this essay Crayon reveals the population with which Knickerbocker converses, hinting at—but never revealing—the sources for the “surprising though true history of Ichabod Crane and the headless horseman” (110). He is “tempted to give some few particulars concerning that spell-bound region; especially as it has risen to historic importance” (105).<sup>8</sup> By the end of the essay, Irving expresses his fears that commercialization and industry will cause “the antiquarian visitor to the Hollow . . . [to] pronounce all that I have recorded of that once favored region, a fable”

(113). Irving covers his narrative tracks well by 1839, so that the existence of the narrative Sleepy Hollow remains despite its gradual disappearance. Perhaps this was his intention as well when he added the “Postscript” to “Rip Van Winkle” in the 1848 Author’s Revised Edition of the *Sketch Book*.

Foucault contends that heterotopias “always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (“Of Other 26”).<sup>9</sup> To enter these spaces (if entry is not compulsory) one must “submit to rites and purifications.” In order to gain access to Sleepy Hollow, one must read or at least be familiar with the details of Irving’s “legend.” By moving through a series of diegetic portals, the reader can then enter the world of Ichabod, Katrina, Brom, and the Hessian. In introducing the village to his readers, Irving even proposes that visitors to the region, after “[residing] there for a time,” begin “to inhale the witching influence of the air, and begin to grow imaginative, to dream dreams, and see apparitions” (Irving, “Legend” 33). Without Irving’s text as a first-narrative ingress, the geographical location loses its heterotopic significance. Irving creates these doorways by blurring the boundaries of the narrative frames through his use of nested narration.

In order to work with those levels of storytelling, Irving must begin with history. Even though the storyteller at the “Corporation meeting of the ancient city of Manhattoes” tells the tale, there is a metanarrational leap from that telling to its being the “favorite story” of the “old country wives” who tell it “about the neighborhood” (Irving, “Legend” 54–56). There exists another metanarrational leap when one sees that the legend of the Headless Horseman is also told in Sleepy Hollow at the same time Ichabod lives there. The source of this legend, as with the other spirits, dates back to “before the

country was discovered by Master Hendrick Hudson” (32). Following the links in the chain, one sees that the narrative springs from the land itself, which Irving reinforces with the epigraph from Thompson’s *Castle of Indolence*: “A pleasing land of drowsy head it was” (31). By beginning with the physical landscape, Irving can claim a history in which England’s authority—the colonial paternal figure—had no proper place. Thus embracing the Dutch historical foundations of the settling of New York becomes a way for the author and his readers to evade the colonial Oedipal guilt of the postcolonial American narrative.<sup>10</sup>

Though the Dutch provide a proxy paternal history, the specter of English colonial rule still remains in Sleepy Hollow. In fact, even when ghosts are not involved, the “sager folks . . . with old Van Tassel . . . [draw] out long stories about the war” (Irving, “Legend” 47). The geography of Sleepy Hollow is such that the “British and American line had run near it during the war,” and consequently it seems to be contested ground. But in addition to the tales of Doffue Martling and the nameless “old gentleman” of the Battle of White Plains, the ghost stories of Sleepy Hollow are rooted in the Revolution as well. One of the most prominent tales is of the “funeral trains, and mourning cries and wailings heard and seen about the great tree where the unfortunate Major André was taken, and which stood in the neighborhood” (48). Since Major John André’s actions could have cost America the Revolution, and he was both captured and hanged “in the neighborhood,” the precariousness of the land’s identity seems at the heart of that particular tale.<sup>11</sup>

Given the approximate timeline of the Irving’s legend, this postcolonial self-consciousness seems appropriate. Irving published “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in

1820, and the narrator states that the actions of the tale occur “in a remote period of American history . . . some thirty years since” (Irving, “Legend” 33). Hence, the story takes place around 1790, only seven years after the Peace of Paris and chronologically close to the first presidential election.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the Headless Horseman tale could only be, at its oldest, fourteen years old. Terence Martin notes that “only in the America of the time could a remote period of history be defined as thirty years” (143). Therefore in 1790 it makes sense that the awareness of instability would give rise to the circulation of these stories. Moreover, Irving treats his tale with undue reverence—a tone of veracity usually reserved for older, more established legends. In a way, Irving’s pre-antiquating of the tale helps to blend it into a national historical conformity.

The tale of the Headless Horseman, also referred to as the “Gallopian Hessian,” takes on a new significance in light of the village’s unpredictable postcolonial status. Considered to be the “dominant spirit” and “the commander-in-chief of all the powers in the air,” the Horseman is the “ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannon ball, in some nameless battle during the Revolutionary war” (32). Since the Hessians fought for the British against the Americans, the ghost of the Headless Horseman fulfills a proxy paternal signification.<sup>13</sup> The fact that he is headless, and more specifically that he is headless as the result of a Revolutionary battle, implies the castration of the paternal figure and a potential unsettling of the paternal metaphor that allows for the slippage in narration. Lacan maintains that “the symbolic Father is, in so far as he signifies this law, the dead father” (“On a question” 199), but the Horseman is not dead, he is undead, sempiternal, which causes the conflict to continue. In postcolonial terms, the subject experiences “a discursive process by which the excess or



slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) . . . becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence. . . . both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual’” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry” 86).

Given this effect of the Hessian on the village of Sleepy Hollow, Irving sets the stage for the expression of postcolonial angst worthy of Eteocles and Polynices. Brom Bones is a child of the land, one of the “Sleepy Hollow Boys,” who has been rightfully nurtured in the Dutch antiquity and landscape of New York. Terence Martin describes him as “the only authentic American in the tale” (145). Still, he seems somewhat incomplete, a proxy basic framework American, as his nickname implies. Yet, since Irving seeks to establish the geography of New York as a legitimating psychotopography of American postcolonial consciousness, he becomes an unworthy protagonist of the tale. Likewise, Ichabod Crane becomes a surrogate for the British colonial past embodied in the geography of New England. As a schoolteacher Ichabod seems unjust and arbitrary, fetishizing his power by “[administering] justice with discrimination rather than severity, taking the burden off the backs of the weak, and laying it on those of the strong,” especially the “Dutch urchins” (Irving, “Legend” 34).

Crane relishes this role—“‘doing his duty’ by their parents”—because it mimics political paternal authority, and he uses that authority to fulfill his voracious appetite. He also brings with him the Puritan identity politics in the “large extracts from his invaluable author, Cotton Mather” (Irving, “Legend” 49), but the stigma of the Salem Witch Trials goes along with that identity. Ichabod is not content with his “little empire” in school, and seeks to become “lord of all this scene,” and be able to “snap his fingers in the face of Hans Van Ripper, and every other niggardly patron, and kick any itinerant pedagogue

out-of-doors that should dare to call him comrade!” (35, 46). It seems that Crane looks to reclaim for himself the authority over the Dutch New Yorkers that the British lost with the Revolution. Dutch New York, however, comes off as the real terrain of a land that predates English occupation, but cannot shake off its ghost. The best it can do, as Brom Bones demonstrates, is outrun it. Donald Ringe points out this regional conflict in *Sleepy Hollow*, but does not explore the postcolonial psychology underlying it (460). Crane becomes a paternal straw man that Brom Bones can easily attack. Irving even states that one “one might have mistaken him for . . . some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield” (“Legend” 33). Ghosts, skeletons, and scarecrows all inhabit the real physical village of *Sleepy Hollow* in a humorously gothic, but psychically resonant, postcolonial struggle for identity.

This geographically grounded *mêlée* appeals to an American audience because it allows them to skirt the implied patricidal onus implied by the American Revolution. Ichabod Crane, as a New England straw man, comes almost as a secondary colonizing force, literally a *new* form of England’s old authority. He also carries with him the stigma of a colony gone wrong, what Bhabha terms “menace”—a fetishized form of postcoloniality (85–91). Ichabod is a New England “native of Connecticut” (Irving, “Legend” 33), a state originally settled by the Dutch in the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century but colonized by the Massachusetts Puritans in the mid 1630s (Tindall 27–28). In Crane, Irving presents *New England* as an infectious presence invading *Sleepy Hollow*.

Part of the humor stems from this regional conflict, as Ringe argues, but it also serves as the source of the tale’s geographically grounded terror. *Sleepy Hollow* acts as the stage whereupon two postcolonial regions vie for an authoritative identity. Even

though “New England goes down to defeat at the hands of the New York Dutch” (Ringe 460), New York wins that conflict only by assuming the guise of the undead paternal authority. If indeed Brom Bones plays the part of the ghost on that night, Ichabod believes him to be the Hessian. New York must mimic what it disavows—colonizing English paternal authority. The humor stems from watching the Puritan New England influence become scared of its own shadow.

As a result, it does not matter if the ghost is Brom or not. With Brom’s knowing look, Irving provides his reader with a narrative escape hatch; he allows the reader a way to domesticate the postcolonial ghosts and celebrate the reclamation of American land. What remains haunting about the tale, and indeed *Sleepy Hollow* itself, is that even with Ichabod out of the picture, the village must continually outrun the ghost of the Hessian. Both Irving and his readers may find comfort in the ousting of the British/New England authority to link back to the legitimating original Dutch ancestry, but the psychotopography of *Sleepy Hollow* remains a haunted region where they can confront the postcolonial identity politics of American history.

#### Notes

1. Noting that it “has been insufficiently stressed that Time is one of Irving’s chief characters,” Neider makes the point that Irving “must have strongly sensed Time’s . . . effect as something resembling a nightmare” (xxi). Neider’s recurrent use of the word “nightmare” echoes the gothic resonance of Irving’s tales.
2. Foucault defines Heterotopias as “real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (“Of Other” 24).
3. Bhabha derives this term from Freud’s “unheimlich” or “uncanny” (literally “unhomely”) but focuses more on the postcolonial implications of the term and how it relates to a national “home” and the resurfacing of a repressed culture.

4. Bhabha describes the concept of the “beyond” as “neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. . . . Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years’ but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (“Introduction” 1).

5. This idea is Foucault’s third principle of heterotopias: “Thus it is that the theater brings onto the whole rectangle of the stage . . . a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (“Of Other” 25).

6. It is at this point that I tend to disagree with many arguments made about “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” The majority of scholars appear to take it for granted that Brom Bones simply played the part of the Headless Horseman in order to scare Ichabod away. This belief assumes that the ghost is not a real possibility within the psychotopography of Sleepy Hollow, dismissing it as provincial hogwash. Yet it seems possible that even if Brom Bones mimicked the Hessian in that particular instance, the ghost may still be haunting the area. Thus, the “truth” of who or what Ichabod encounters in his night chase seems irrelevant. An effect of the view that the ghost does not exist also seems to be that critics overlook the details of the ghost and pay little attention to the details of the stories within Irving’s narrative. Perhaps the scholars’ viewing the inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow as provincial bumpkins and their not even considering their experience as potentially legitimate (real) is a symptom of the postcolonial status antebellum American literature.

7. Rubin-Dorsky goes on to say that the location of Sleepy Hollow is a “legend” because “As an actual geographic entity, as a community, Sleepy Hollow could never have existed, for its harmony, its somnolence, its peaceful coexistence with the forces of nature, are, if anything, prelapsarian in character” (“Value” 404). I disagree with Rubin-Dorsky’s assessment because, if anything, Sleepy Hollow is a geographic entity north of Tarrytown, NY, and is a very real place, even if it is represented in a romantic manner. Moreover, the undercurrent of hauntings present in the village, the “angry echoes” and the “nightmare,” especially since the majority of the talk in the town refers to the American Revolution, undercut the image that Sleepy Hollow is prelapsarian. At best, it appears as a town that would like to appear as prelapsarian when it is not. Such a situation may prefigure the view of the American Romantic movement and the Hudson River School of painters, both of which spring from America’s postcolonial self-consciousness.

8. Irving wisely does not spoil the illusion of narration with this essay. He claims that the town has become historic “under the pen of my revered friend and master, the sage historian of the New Netherlands. . . . the worthy Diedrich [Knickerbocker]” (Irving, “Sleepy” 105). As a result, Irving does not disturb the narrative structure he has set up, and perhaps even reinforces it by providing more details of the town such as the presence of “an old goblin looking mill” (110). The mill is possibly both the oldest building and the oldest building still standing in Sleepy Hollow, having been built 1680s. The Old Dutch Church is the second oldest building in the town, having been built around 1685.

He also asserts the truth of “the surprising though true history of Ichabod Crane and the headless horseman, which has since astounded and edified the world” (110).

9. This idea is Foucault’s fifth principle of heterotopias (“Of Other” 26).

10. England asserted their claim to the New Netherlands in 1664 under Charles I, renaming the land New York (Tindall 33). Thus, in the context of the history of the legend, the Dutch settlers are the true forefathers of the region.

11. André was a British Major who acted as a go-between for Benedict Arnold in his plot to sell-out West Point. He was captured and hanged as a spy at Tarrytown, an act by which Arnold was exposed and West Point protected (Tindall 135).

12. The chronology of the tale also places it close to, though after, the awakening of Rip Van Winkle. The connection of chronology, though never concrete, seems to imply that both of the tales deal directly with the emergence of an American identity as well as its foundation on an ambiguous/negated paternal anchor. Hence, given Crayon’s personal crisis of national identity, there seems an unconscious expression in his inclusion of these tales in his Sketch Book—an expression Crayon (Irving) can safely approach more directly years later with his “Sleepy Hollow” essay and Rip Van Winkle “Postscript.”

13. Though the Hessians are considered to be mercenaries, that term seems too individualistic to describe their situation. Hessians fulfilled the role of a paid ally, and their services were provided by the German state of their origin in exchange for monies and the forgiving of debts owed to the British. The troopers themselves usually received no mercenary compensation other than their usual military pay.

CHAPTER 3  
THE BRINK OF ETERNITY: POE, GEOGRAPHY, AND ANTARCTIC ABJECTION

The first extensive psychoanalytic reading of Poe's life and works, Marie Bonaparte's 1933 study *Edgar Poe: Étude psychanalytique (Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation, English trans. 1949)*, has as its frontispiece a map of the East Coast of the United States. Since she grounds her analysis of Poe heavily in terms of the Oedipus narrative, one might expect to find a picture of Eliza Poe ("mommy"), John Allan ("daddy"), or Poe himself ("son"). Instead, the first image one confronts when reading this text is of Poe's literal geography. Though Bonaparte does not fully explore the implications of this geographical representation of Poe's life, maps and their meanings had more of an impact on Poe than many scholars have assumed. In describing his use of spatial metaphors to explain this type of influence, Michel Foucault proposes how,

to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation and demarcation of objects, . . . [and] the organization of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes—historical ones, needless to say—of power. The spatialising decription of discursive realities gives on to the analysis of related effects of power. ("Questions" 70–71)

Thus, the borders of a map can become signifiers for identities grounded in such power. If one looks at Bonaparte's frontispiece one sees that Poe's life has no specific or single geographical signifier; Boston, Richmond, Charlottesville, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, and Providence all have a claim to Poe.<sup>1</sup> That the flow of power does not move in the other direction—Poe does not claim any one of these cites, but instead he claims all

of them—illuminates the importance a comprehensive geography of his nation played in Poe's life.

The narratives of Poe's family history were inextricably bound up with the geography of antebellum America. Eliza Poe, his mother, came to America from England, and she retained a "special fondness" for Boston (Silverman 4–5). David Poe, Jr., his father, had a strong family presence in Baltimore, where his father, the Irish-born David Poe, Sr. was a "locally celebrated Revolutionary war hero" (3). Poe's foster father, John Allan, was a "transplanted Scot" who settled in Richmond (10). Consequently, Poe is born as a Yankee in Boston, is raised as a southern gentleman in Richmond and Charlottesville, and remains shadowed by his unfulfilled military (and Revolutionary) Baltimore roots.

For others, such options might have been liberating, but since cartographic borders isolate and represent geography in terms of ideology and prescriptive identity narratives, Poe felt, on the contrary, trapped. His Baltimore heritage and American nationality mandated he enter West Point to pursue a military career. His Virginia upbringing trained him to be a southern gentleman of business. His Boston birthplace insisted that he become an educated gentleman of American letters.

Indeed, his attachment to Boston literally comes to him in the form of an inheritance. After the death of his mother, Eliza, Poe was given "her watercolor sketch of Boston harbor, on the back of which she had written, 'For my little son Edgar, who should ever love Boston, the place of his birth, and where his mother found her *best*, and *most sympathetic* friends'" (Silverman 9). Thus, it seems that Poe's "Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance" ("Philosophy" 208) is not just for the loss of his mother—

as many psychoanalytic readings of his fictions argue—but rather it is also for the loss of an identity rooted in place; an identity, which for Poe, established an unnarratable future memory. Moreover, he seems to mourn the loss of his Virginia upbringing under the guidance of John Allan, or rather the narrative that it should have produced. Kenneth Silverman points out how in a letter “modeled on the Declaration of Independence” written in March of 1827 to John Allan, Poe accused Allan of having “misled him, restricted him, and rejected him. . . . Allan taught him to aspire to eminence in public life, led him to expect a collegiate education through which distinction might be attained, but then ‘blasted my hope’ of it” (Silverman 35).

Shortly after having sent this letter, Poe fled not just the prescribed narrative that Virginia (Richmond) held for him, but also its places. Poe’s move north reinforces the idea that his geographical identity was bound up with his sense of his own narrativization. Silverman points out that “in distancing himself from the Allans he made his way back to Eliza Poe” (38). Moving from the South to the North meant shifting cultural identities—from the southern gentleman of business to the New England educated gentleman of American letters. Three months after his arrival in Boston, in June 1827, Poe published *Tamerlane and Other Poems* under the pseudonym “A Bostonian.” At the same time, he enlisted in the army, seeking to fulfill his inherited patriarchal narrative of military service. *Tamerlane* did not achieve the success for which Poe had hoped, and consequently he sought to enter West Point. In preparation for this full transition of identities, Poe spent much of his time in Baltimore. That Poe’s life would entail a migratory existence between these northeast cities and New York, Philadelphia, and Providence, as a result of failing to fulfill any of these narratives, or



rather trying to fulfill all of them, suggests that much of Poe's melancholy existence stemmed, at least in part, from a sense of alienation that was bound up in his multiple cultural identities.

Having no specific locus of power, Poe was, however, free to move about the East Coast. The conflict of his prescriptive geographical narratives compelled him to read the borders of a map as signifiers of power and cultural identity, so in psychoanalytic terms they had the potential to define the self in terms of lack (*manque*) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 28).<sup>2</sup> In these terms, Poe was neither a nomad nor an explorer; rather he was *homeless* and *dispossessed*. This *manque*—a form of geographical alienation with psychocultural implications—haunted him, and throughout his writing he sought to undermine its systems of codification.

Such systems do not, I propose, originate within Poe or his childhood experiences, as traditional Freudian psychoanalytic readings such as Bonaparte's argue. On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari contend, these systems are "created, planned, and organized in and through social production. . . . as the result of the pressure of antiproduction . . . [and are] never primary" (*Anti-Oedipus* 28). "*Oedipus is first the idea of an adult paranoiac, before it is the childhood feeling of a neurotic*. So it is that psychoanalysis has much difficulty extracting itself from an infinite regression . . . ." (274). The "infinite regression" of Oedipus founds a prior system of genealogical inheritance that prescribes identity narratives for the child. In the case of Poe, because of its inherited significance of place, geography becomes a principal force of "antiproduction"<sup>3</sup> that insistently imposes such narratives and continually manufactures a sense of lack.

In order to understand exactly how maps and geography can establish themselves as forces of antiproduction, one must first examine how they prescribe national and geographical narratives—how they “put things in their place.” In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson notes that the lines of demarcation on maps in the Nineteenth Century served to isolate and connect varied peoples in an imaginary way (175). These lines isolate; they also permit the removal of the geographical space (and its inhabitants) from its surrounding geographical context. Such a process, Anderson argues, allows for easier commodification through “logoization” (176). The geographical space becomes “Pure sign. . . . In this shape, the map entered an infinitely reproducible series, available for transfer to posters, official seals, letterheads. . . . Instantly recognizable, everywhere visible, the logo-map penetrated deep into the popular imagination, forming a powerful emblem for the anticolonial nationalisms being born” (175). The “logoization” of geographic space creates a cultural geographic identity, while “museumization” begins to prescribe that identity as an “inheritance at a more popular level” (183).

In the case of the young United States, those maps became signifiers anchored in a mythic national paternal metaphor. America, from the viewpoint of authors such as Cooper, Irving, and Emerson, was founded on the myth of America as a new Eden, a myth which itself stems from the Puritans’ and Columbus’s discovery myth.<sup>4</sup> Antebellum America’s postcolonial self-conscious anxiety emerges from this myth. But as Myra Jehlen asserts, “the first act in knowing ‘America’ is acknowledging it as a concrete fact. . . . the solid reality, the *terra firma* on which Columbus disembarked. . . . the decisive factor shaping the founding conceptions of ‘America’ and of ‘the American’ was material rather than conceptual; rather than a set of abstract ideas, the physical fact of

the continent” (3). Yet it also seems that the translation of that physical fact—the “American incarnation” as Jehlen terms it<sup>5</sup>—into the symbolic process created for some an alienating and impossible telos. Jehlen observes that “by translating infinite time into universal space, the conception of a New World permitted principles that in the old world were rendered relative by their connection to process and growth to become absolute, timeless natural laws in the new” (9). The timeless nature of the American telos severs it from prior history; it detaches itself from the European paternal metaphor and sets the American subject adrift. Reestablishing those laws in the fiction of an untouched but fixed geography potentially alienates the American subject because it is, as Jehlen argues, “better described as an entelechy than as a teleology” (25).

By Poe’s generation, even the fiction of a vacant landscape could no longer be upheld, and self-perceived post-colonial regions were beginning to expand their own and conflicting teleological narratives. Antebellum America was still busy establishing and testing those geographical lines. Anderson notes that the independence of nations in the Americas, by the 1830s, “had thus become an inheritance, and, as an inheritance, it was compelled to enter a genealogical series” (196). Entering into such a series, Anderson argues, requires bridging the gap between memory and its lack. This gap, especially as it relates to the genealogy of cultural identity, produces an “estrangement” and “out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity*” that “must be narrated” (204). The narration of a cultural identity, however, once told, becomes a mirror through which, in a Lacanian ideal, one defines the Other and establishes subjectivity. For Poe, such was the case because of his multiple and often conflicting genealogical narratives.

In *Constituting Americans*, Priscilla Wald notes that through Poe's "William Wilson" (1839) "the confusion is fueled by guilt brought on by the disjunction between what the character does and what the character believes he is supposed to do. . . . The haunted [protagonist] . . . must fight the self-doubt occasioned by his difference from the prevailing norms" (136). Wald accurately diagnoses this trend in Poe; it seems that the presence of geographical narratives accounts for much of Poe's disjunctive identity.

Jehlen notes that because of the entelechy inherent in the American incarnation, "the course of history inevitably diverges from the founding vision" (25). Poe's anxiety issues from this divergence. That he had at least three separate narratives to satisfy might seem enough, but that two of these narratives directly conflicted with each other allowed him no peace. David Leverenz points out not only that Poe "vacillated among the contradictory expectations of gentry roles" in the South, but also that the current northern (Boston, New England) cultural identities set "two postcolonial regions on a collision course" ("Poe" 216–217).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the North and the South were both regions that rebelled against England, but having overthrown "daddy," the "children" engaged in a sibling rivalry for the father's power. As Deleuze and Guattari observe, "The great territorialities have fallen into ruin, but the structure proceeds with all the subjective and private reterritorializations" (*Anti-Oedipus* 308). Anderson describes how the "imagining of fraternity, without which the reassurance of fratricide can not be born, shows up remarkably early, and not without a curious authentic popularity" (202).

This "fraternity," as Anderson presents it, emerges "in the age of [Jules] Michelet" as he was "summoning his Oedipus," and "is particularly well exemplified" "by the United States in the Nineteenth Century. Anderson's examples address fictional

interracial relationships (such as Cooper's Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook), but he does mention how Americans try "to remember/forget the hostilities of 1861–1865 as a great 'civil' war between brothers" (201). In order for such a "familial" dispute to occur, Oedipus must split—and Oedipus can only split, as Anderson's examples illustrate, "when it [is] no longer possible to experience the nation as new, at the wave-top moment of rupture" (203). The country becomes an inheritance because the myth of a vacant land implodes, so the son splits to refresh the Oedipal cycle.<sup>7</sup> In his journals, Ralph Waldo Emerson, with whose Transcendental Boston-based literary "clique" Poe first sought acceptance, describes southerners "in civil educated company where anything human is going forward" as being "dumb and unhappy; like an Indian in a church" (70). Emerson goes so far to express that the North was a colonizing "father" to the South: "Yes, gentlemen, but do you know why Massachusetts and New York are so tame? It is because we own you, and are very tender of our mortgages which cover all your property" (131–132). Leverenz notes that "Emerson's landlord presumption helps explain Poe's vitriolic attacks on the Boston literati," but it does so only if one acknowledges the psychocultural implications of Poe's geographically alienated identity.

Poe thus becomes caught in the crossfire between his prescriptive northern and southern identities, and as such he begins to see himself as the perpetual Other. He is a subject continually lost in translation. But such a situation also explodes the teleological classifications of the Oedipus narrative—Poe's geographical "mother," "brother," and "father" become conflated and implode like the House of Usher. He has no choice but to become "paranoiac"—his forces of "antiproduction" take on multiple foci, perpetually generating lack (*manque*) and continually alienating him. In such a state, Poe begins to

“invest the formation of central sovereignty; [overinvest] it by making it the final eternal cause for all the other social forms of history; [counterinvest] the enclaves or the periphery; and [disinvest] every ‘free’ figure of desire” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 277). Yet, the primary difference between the paranoiac and the “schizophrenic” is the subject’s perception of choice. Both “do not operate on the socius, but on the body without organs in the pure state” (281), but the schizophrenic views this state as liberating (even if he or she is not there by choice), while the paranoiac views it as both confining and alienating. Poe struggled to find lines of escape from such confinement, and one sees this struggle reflected throughout his literature, as he sought to shift from a state of paranoia to one of “becoming schizophrenic.”

Such a state, in Lacanian terms, requires a return to the Real. Having lost the imaginary and being imprisoned/alienated within the teleology of the symbolic, Poe seeks his line of escape there. Whether such a method of deterritorialization was possible for Poe or not, his attempts to evade “organization” through his writing results in a “schizonoiac” literature (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 281). Because “Oedipus is a dependency of the paranoiac territoriality” (278), the schizonoiac endeavors to make the periphery dominant. Poe never achieves his goal; instead, he creates a schizonoiac “third space” that teams with multiple and detached, yet mutually dependent, signifiers (Bhabha, “Commitment” 37). Such symbols are mutually dependant because they defy codification only when they occur together. In terms of Poe’s geographic identity, his alienated northern self and his alienated southern self negate each other, eventually liberating his geocultural identity (freeing him to live in a border city, like Philadelphia or Baltimore or New York). But the now liberated Poe attempts to reterritorialize himself in

the Real—as what Lacan terms the “vanishing being in which the symbol finds the permanence of the concept” that allows it to be “freed from its usage to become the word freed from the *hic et nunc*” (“Function” 65).<sup>8</sup> Because of its transitory nature, the Real resists such a reterritorialization in that “third space” of nothingness (Baltimore cannot be coded as the center, for example). Consequently, Poe’s paranoiac identity remains a constant “mimic man”—almost the Real, but “not quite” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry” 86).

Though Deleuze and Guattari celebrate this condition, Julia Kristeva recasts it in the negative light of abjection. If one applies Kristeva’s theories to Poe’s condition, one sees that both he and his writings exemplify her concept of the abject: “A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been . . . now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. . . . A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me” (Kristeva 2). Instead of the return *of* the repressed, Poe actively initiates a return *to* the repressed in order to liberate it in the hopes of a reconstruction. The problem he encounters is that by inducing a return to the Real, Poe reformulates himself as abject in his quest to refashion his identity and consequently becomes border-stuck. Building on Leslie Fiedler’s observation that that “the whole tradition of the gothic is a pathological symptom rather than a proper literary movement” (135), Eric Savoy points out how it is the abject “into which the normative American subject must cast the irrational, the desire unacceptable to consciousness, and locate it ‘over there’ in some frightening incarnation of the always inaccessible Real” (170). American Gothic, he argues, manifests itself as a catachresis<sup>9</sup> which strains “powerfully but ineffectively in an always fragmentary narrative” (171). Poe’s gothic view is exactly that, and it manifests itself in spatial, geographic, textual,

and linguistic ways. Catachresis as a deliberate form of expression would be one way for Poe to begin an attempt to undermine signification and undo the codification of the Symbolic. In so doing, one would begin to give voice to the abject, but that voice would indeed be misapplied, strained, and imploded.

Wald argues that “Conscience, after all, marks an internalized, social acceptability, a recognizing in social terms” (136). Her statement builds on Lacan’s understanding that “*the unconscious is the discourse of the Other*” where a “plurality of subjects” is not in and of itself problematic (“Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” 32). If the Other speaks through the unconscious, which is impossible to know in its entelechy, then the Other may speak only incompletely. The Other speaks with a “presence made of absence” which “itself comes to be named in an original moment” that undergoes “perpetual re-creation” (“Function” 64). That name remains evanescent, and cannot remain fixed but is instead “embodied only by being the trace of a nothingness.” Deleuze and Guattari term this “trace of nothingness” as one form of the “body without organs” (*Anti-Oedipus* 281). In fact, the “body without organs is the limit of the socius, its tangent of deterritorialization, the ultimate residue of a deterritorialized socius.” This “residue” is the “third space” of Poe’s literature—the gothic, the absurd, and the grotesque. It is that literary space formed out of a geocultural identity, “though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha, “Commitment” 37).

Poe’s schizonoic tales, when viewed in this way, become microcosms swarming with impish signs that defy codification through their matrices of signifying chains.



Roland Barthes's "Textual Analysis of a Tale of Poe"<sup>10</sup> illustrates this point quite effectively by pointing out how one should return "in a freer, less attached manner, to the progressive unrolling of the text" (93). Indeed, Barthes goes on to say, "very often in Poe's story we have seen the same sentence refer to two codes simultaneously, without being able to choose which is 'true' . . . the characteristic of the narrative, once it attains the quality of a text, is to constrain us to the undecidability of the codes" (96). The principal vehicle of such "undecidability" is the narrator. Poe personifies the schizonoiac space in his tales with his narrators, who almost always speak in the first person. Moreover, their identities remain ambiguously anonymous ("Ligeia"), possess fictionally obscure names ("Berenice"), or present intentionally false names ("William Wilson").

In addition, their tales, as Jonathan Elmer points out, are confessional, even if the "crime" is simply witnessing the inexpressible. "Confession," as Elmer notes, "opens the social limit, allowing the confessor to embody—monstrously, disfiguringly—the limit itself" (164). Poe's narrative style unanchors the signifying capabilities of the words themselves by attacking the telos inherent in the signification. Lacan argues "the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by deploying its dimension in some sense before it" ("Instance" 145). Yet that meaning is continually determined retrospectively in the unfolding of the signifying chain. By pushing the telos of signification to its limit, Poe effectively eliminates the insistence of meaning. But to do so attacks history itself, since the distance between signifiers and signification can be measured chronologically. As one closes the retrospective gap between signifiers, one moves closer to the imminent moment of experience, closer to the Real experience of abjection.

Elmer's description of the confessor as "monstrously, disfiguringly" becoming the "social limit"—another version of the "body without organs"—fully illuminates Poe's attempts to deterritorialize his signifiers and then reterritorialize the polysymbolic (gaps and all) as the norm. Poe's characters, especially his narrators, may be "monstrous" but if they are so it is because, as James Twitchell observes,

they block our attempts to classify, categorize, and hence control them. . . . our fears are carried within the word itself, for 'monster' in medical terminology refers to a fetus that is abnormal, combining human with something else, literally grotesque. But such 'monsters' clearly threaten our classifying systems not our well-being. (24)

Readers of a tale like "Berenice" are horrified not because they anticipate harm to their own person, but because boundaries and definitions of the Other in the text dissolve, immix, and become progressively meaningless as they voluntarily read on. "Monster" also stems from the Latin "monstrum," which means "portent" or "omen." Its roots, "monere" and "monstro" both mean "to bemoan" and "to show" respectively. Therefore, a monster appears not only as a threat to "our classifying systems" but also as a misarticulated, almost painful, warning against the teleology those systems embody. The genre that serves as a primary vehicle for that warning—the grotesque—comes from the word "grotto," as Victoria Nelson points out (2). But "grotto" (vulgar Latin "grupta") is itself a vulgarization of the Latin "crypta" which means "hidden pit," "vault" or "cave." Even the word itself subverts the teleology of its signifier. What comes out of that cave is the ominous portent warning of the limits of the signifying chain. Thus it seems Poe's literary style attempts to give voice to the subversion of the teleology of signification, and the entelechy of what for him was an othering American geographical narrative.

Poe descends into or excavates that grotto to release what is confined rather than simply waiting for his monsters to release themselves. Unfortunately, his narrators (and

to a certain extent, Poe himself) do so at the cost of their own psychotic destruction. The nameless narrator of the “Tell-Tale Heart” questions his readers with his first sentence, which ironically begins with the word “True!” (259). His asking “but why *will* you say that I am mad?” (259–260) accompanied with his “excessive reasonableness,” may serve “to increase the readers’ doubts about the criminal’s sanity” (Elmer 130), but that very effect blocks the possibility of using the term “sanity” at all. Poe’s narrator does not question his own condition, but rather questions the signification of the sign. By asking the reader “why *will* you say that I am mad?” the narrator effaces its meaning, negates the sign, because to make such a judgment requires that the reader be “rational.” But as Jacques Derrida’s theories contend, the fact that Poe writes his narrator’s confessions helps subvert their very meaning:

The ‘rationality’ . . . which governs a writing thus enlarged and radicalized, no longer issues from a logos. Further it inaugurates the destruction . . . the de-sedimentation, the deconstruction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of *truth*. (10)

By questioning the signification of “sanity”—being “mad”—the narrator deterritorializes<sup>11</sup> both sanity and madness. Thus, to say that the narrator is mad because of “how healthily—how calmly [he] can tell [me] the whole story” (Poe, “Tell-Tale” 260) throws the rationality of the entire statement into dissolution. Moreover, the narrator’s emphasis on the word “will” implies not just what Lacan terms the “*insistence* of the signifying chain” (“Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” 28)—the “will” of codification—but also that “which, in the concept of the sign, . . . remains systematically and genealogically determined by that history” (Derrida 14).

The contradictory nature of the narrator’s tale, where “truth” dissolves and in so doing upsets the chain of signification, ultimately results in the narrator’s compulsion to

unravel himself. The “villain” (anti-hero) of the tale, the narrator, calls the “officers of the police” “Villains!” (262). Insisting that they “dissemble no more!,” the narrator confesses his deed. That confession is spurred by the ambivalent/uncertain location of the beating heart of his victim: “I found that the noise was *not* within my ears.” Poe’s narrator cannot continue to exist in the presence of the Real, however. “I felt that I must scream or die,” he says, but to scream is to confine himself to death in the Symbolic—by wanting to reveal a symbolic heart for the noise produced as the hallmark of its absence.

In fact, the narrator’s deed, not just his confession, stems from this will to defy codification. In his classic essay on the mirror stage, Lacan observes that,

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of *spatial identification*, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to . . . an “orthopedic” form in its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an *alienating identity* . . . (“Mirror” 4, emphasis added)

That is, the ego stems from an illusory integrity presupposed by the attentions of the gaze, the “I” springs from the “eye.” That “I,” however, is trapped in the Symbolic; it has lost the completeness of the Imaginary. What drives Poe’s narrator—indeed the majority of his narrators—to acts of self-destruction is the resistance to the will of such territorialization in the Symbolic. They seek escape from the Symbolic to the Real—but to reterritorialize in the real is to dissolve and become abject. As Kristeva describes it, “it is no longer I who expel, ‘I’ is expelled. . . .It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. . . . a hatred that smiles” (3–4). Her emphasis on this subverted order sums up perfectly the essence of Poe’s narrator’s actions: “I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him” (Poe, “Tell-Tale” 260).

The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” commits his murderous/suicidal act because of the old man’s “eye! . . . . He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold. . . . I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever” (260). The paradox is that the “blue eye, with a film over it” is presumably one that cannot see. Just as Poe’s narrator hears a heart that does not exist, he feels the gaze of an eye that cannot see. Thus, from non-existence does the narrator derive his “I,” but to destroy that “eye/I,” to resist the symbolic permanently, is suicide. The locus of the gaze is a condition of being: the narrator cannot exist in the Symbolic, nor can he remain in the Real.

Robert Seaman notes that Poe’s fisherman narrator in “A Descent into the Maelström,” because the terror has “broken [him] up body and soul” (Poe, “Descent” 40), has experienced “the mirror stage in reverse, a regression from the symbolic phase to the imaginary” (Seaman 198). The fisherman, however, remains alienated in his experience; he is at first “speechless from the memory of [the ström’s] horror” (50), but eventually reterritorializes back into the Symbolic. He does not resist the flows of the ström, but instead he “precipitated [him]self . . . into the sea, without another moment’s hesitation” (49). Thus, his is not a regression back to the Imaginary, but rather a traumatic encounter with the Real. It is not “the mirror stage in reverse,” but something more extreme—a temporary escape from both of its phases; temporary because any experience of the Real must be fleeting and uncontrollable, and non-fatal because the fisherman does not attempt to reterritorialize the flow of that experience.

Indeed, most of Poe’s “tales of ratiocination,” such as “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Purloined Letter,” depict the analytical as simply moving with the

flow of deterritorialized signs. Dupin's greatest power, then, is to decode himself—to step outside the chain of signification temporarily—and then recode his experiences for his narrator and the prefects of police.<sup>12</sup> Lacan realized this fact in his “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”: “for Dupin what is perhaps at stake is his withdrawal from the symbolic circuit of the letter” (49). At one point the fisherman even notes that he seemed to witness “a magnificent rainbow” in the vortex, “like that narrow and tottering bridge which Musselmen say is the only pathway between Time and Eternity” (Poe, “Descent” 48). Hovering over the abyss, the maelström seems to be a physical embodiment of the Lacanian Real, the experience of which may return the subject to abjection.

The narrator of “The Imp of the Perverse,” however, lacks the fisherman's ability to prevent his own self-destruction. He tells his reader in a cool tone, “We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy” (270). To “peer into the abyss” is to experience the Real. The abyss is fully defined by its non-presence, and to experience it totally and as the center of codification is to experience the “rushing annihilation” of abjection; it is to fail in “a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves backward from the abyss, . . . [to] plunge, and [be] destroyed.” That the narrator has committed the crime of murder is not enough. That act is merely to “peer into the abyss”—he has deterritorialized the chain of signification by leaving “no shadow of a clue by which it would be possible to convict, or even to suspect” him (there is no Dupin in this tale to temporarily recalibrate the Real in relation to those signs). Yet, for the narrator, this experience is not enough. His desire is to continually exist in the Real by reterritorializing it as the center of codification—to confess his crime aloud and *still* avoid suspicion. He silently repeats to himself the phrase “I am safe” until this desire for

oblivion—what he terms “the spirit of the *Perverse*”—causes him to realize that “to think, in my situation, was to be lost” (271). Unable to resist “a maddening desire to shriek aloud,” the narrator confesses his crime and condemns himself in doing so. That action reasserts a now fatal symbolic order.

In his analysis of the tale, Stanley Cavell notes, “the prefix *im-* [such as in the title word “Imp”] that is initially felt to be perverse, since, . . . it has opposite meanings. With adjectives it is a negation or privative, as in . . . *imperfect* . . . ; with verbs it is an affirmation of intensive, as in . . . *imprison* . . .” (23). Poe’s use of “Imp” in his title appears now to be a clever choice—the signifier itself is an “imp” whose signifieds are multiple and potentially mutually negating. Hence, the “imp” is one potential way of expressing abjection. “The Imp of the Perverse,” then, activates the desire to recast one’s identity outside of the symbol and by so doing annihilate the “I”—to become schizonoiac or abject. Thus, it perverts Lacan’s idea that “the end of the symbolic process is that non-being comes to be, that he is because he has spoken” (“Sign” 209). Instead, the narrator shows us that the abject schizonoiac views the end of non-being as when the symbolic comes to be, that he *is not* because he has spoken.

In *American Incarnation*, Myra Jehlen writes that “To its European settlers . . . America did not connote society, or history, but indeed its natural parameters, geography” (5). By the 1830s, however, that geography—through its cartographic signifiers and demarcations—became inextricably bound up with society, history, and genealogical inheritance. For Poe, the geography of America came to him from all angles, each with its own specifically inherited, prescriptive, and teleological psychocultural identity narratives. He saw those narratives as the signifieds of an

ideological geographical chain of signification and, unable to fulfill them all, he began to view himself as an Other delimited by his lack of a single geographical signifier. Seeking a line of escape from this geographical realm, Poe de-scribes those narratives in an unreliable matrix of non-signification that attempts to reanchor them in the Real. The result is a politically charged and psychologically complex schizonoic “third space” of meaning—one outside or on the limits of the codification of the socius. That is why Poe, after having considered the literary nationalist movement of his time (which itself was an offshoot of the “American incarnation”), rejected the “Young America” literary movement.<sup>13</sup> As Kenneth Silverman states, Poe felt that “foreign themes are to be preferred for providing an element of strangeness” and to avoid becoming “a continuation of England” (249).

Poe seemed to share the attitude that America embodied an entelechy, but realized the potential of it had already become bankrupt. Consequently, Poe’s character of Arthur Gordon Pym appears as the inversion of Irving’s Geoffrey Crayon.<sup>14</sup> Pym’s adventure becomes distinctly tied up in ideas of geography. The natural parameters of America and the paternal influence of a mythic post-colonial consciousness seem to force both Poe and Pym to seek an anti-teleological landscape. Leslie Fiedler observes that Pym’s experience is “finally an anti-Western disguised as the form it travesties” (394). But if, as Fiedler notes, the “West . . . was always for Poe only half real, . . . ; but the South moved him at the deepest personal level” (397), then it seems that Poe’s ambivalent feelings of being a southerner trapped in a northerner’s psyche generate the impetus for Pym’s attempt to escape. Yet Pym does not move west; that geography has already become swept up into the teleology of what would become manifest destiny.<sup>15</sup> Instead,



he is driven literally to the end of the Earth—the Antarctic. William E. Lenz argues that Poe is the first American writer to represent this geography of nothingness because “the importance of . . . the Antarctic to the American mind, to a self-conscious and visionary view of American history, and to expanded notions of manifest destiny is clear: The Antarctic is a new American frontier, an analogous and imaginative New World” (33).

Yet Poe does not seek the Antarctic just as a blank slate. Lenz points out that “For Poe, Cooper, and Melville, . . . the Antarctic took on the allegorical aura of the last true terra incognita, which had previously been associated with the American West” (33). Pym’s Antarctic becomes the geographic manifestation of abjection. It is not simply a romantic untamed land, it is a geographical region that has at its center (the South Pole) a “cataract” or maelström, a “South Polar Grotto” (Nelson 139) that devours its narrator. Victoria Nelson points out that this maelström “is also the vortex in the unconscious toward which the conscious ego feels both attraction and fear. The two realms, outer and inner, are congruent and resonate sympathetically” (150). The cataract into which Pym descends is the psychotopography of abjection.

Though Pym willingly leaves Nantucket, he does not set out to become engulfed by the cataract in the Antarctic. Poe writes the Antarctic not because it is simply untouched topography, but rather it is the negation of an American topography; it is an anti-entelechy. Jon Hauss notes this effect of the Antarctic maelström when he observes that both “MS. Found in an Bottle” and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* initiate

A kind of fascinated attention to global geography. It compels us to begin conjuring a mental image of the planet in order simply to follow its narrative. Then it matter-of-factly leaves most of that globe unformed. The picture we are left with is one of a partial earth hanging within representational nothingness. . . . In short, Poe sketches a world that looms indistinctly out of unthinkable void, and this looming world is characterized chiefly by reversion to unthinkable void. (148)

The unthinkable void of Pym's geography begins when he casts off his paternal authority, embodied by Mr. Peterson, his assumed maternal grandfather. Though Peterson threatens to "cut [Pym] off with a shilling" if he talks of going to sea, it is Pym himself who unfastens the paternal bond by rebuking his grandfather (Poe, *Narrative* 58). Though Pym is threatened with symbolic castration ("cut off"), it is his grandfather who is rendered impotent. Peterson grows "excessively red" then runs at Pym "with his umbrella uplifted" only to "[stop] short" and "hobble off down the street" (60).

After rebuking his grandfather, Pym then flees Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard. Daniel Hoffman makes note of this fact when he observes that the novel begins with "a departure from Edgartown. While the place name on Martha's Vineyard makes possible this coincidence, many readers have noticed a further euphonic similarity between the name of the protagonist and that of the author of this narrative. We see that what is being sailed away from is the self, the ego" (260). Pym initiates his own abjection, but what Hoffman suggests is a coincidence of author and place names reinforces the notion that Poe saw his identity as geographically anchored and determined. It further suggests that Pym truly is what Kristeva describes as the "*alter ego*" of the author that initiates a "topology of catastrophe" (9). Kristeva goes on to describe this condition: "For, having provided itself with an *alter ego*, the Other no longer has a grip on the three apices of the triangle where subjective homogeneity resides; and so, it jettisons the object into an abominable real, inaccessible except through jouissance." This ambivalence of identity comes full circle at the end of the narrative, when Poe adds the final note. Harold Beaver notes this conflation of authorial identity, observing "Pym is oddly both alive and dead: alive enough to reclaim his narrative from Mr. Poe, but dead before he can account for

his salvation” (Commentary 270). The only way to account for this confusion is psychological—Pym exists in Poe.

It makes sense that Pym would enter the womb-like belly of the *Grampus* and become adrift after unfastening the paternal authority with which his world is anchored. Indeed, the *Grampus* is a manifestation of Pym’s descent into abjection. The ship is a space of authority slippage. The shifting cargo, for example, traps him in the hold. Overcoming that obstacle with difficulty, he becomes “entombed” by the moved “chain cables” which block his exit through the trap (Poe, *Narrative* 68–70). In addition, Pym loses track of time while he is in the hold: “I looked at the watch; but it was run down, and there were, consequently, no means of determining how long I slept” (64). Indeed, the watch runs down twice, refusing to allow any temporal anchor for narrative. Pym cannot read the note Augustus passes to him, and when he can make out some words they float without context only to alienate Pym more:

And ‘blood,’ too, that word of all words—so rife at all times with mystery, and suffering, and terror—how terribly full of import did it now appear—how chillily and heavily (disjointed, as it thus was, from any foregoing words to qualify or render it distinct) did its vague syllables fall, amid the deep gloom of my prison, into the innermost recesses of my soul. (76)

In this setting of abjection—even the hold is spatially undefined while remaining impossibly confining—the *Grampus* is almost a natural place of mutiny, indeed two mutinies—the first one that casts off the patriarchal Captain Barnard, and the second one that allows the recapture of the ship.

It is after this double revolution that the *Grampus* begins to disintegrate; the very anchors that maintain it no longer hold, and the bulwarks threaten to let in the sea. In fact, Pym states, “Our deck lay level with the sea, or rather we were encircled with a towering ridge of foam, a portion of which swept over us every instant” (Poe, *Narrative*

122). The borders of the ship no longer exist, and in this state of abjection Pym slowly becomes haunted by that which he has expelled. Phillipe Van Haute points out that “according to Freud, the anxiety about being punished by the father expresses itself in [the perverted patient] as an anxiety about being eaten up by him” (240). Pym himself fears being eaten the most. He dreams he is about to be eaten by a “fierce Lion” with “horrible teeth” (*Narrative* 66). During the dissolution of the *Grampus* he fears the “continual presence of the sharks” no less than six times while he is adrift (154). The sharks serve at times to be the “principle terror” (157) as Pym is “besieged on all sides with sharks” (155). Moreover, Pym fears the “last horrible extremity” of being eaten by his crew as being the “most horrible alternative which could enter into the mind of man” (142). Pym states that these “fearful repast[s]. . . . may be imagined, but words have no power to impress the mind with the exquisite horror of their reality” (146).

Perhaps the most uncanny moment of abjection in the text occurs when Pym encounters the Dutch “hermaphrodite brig,” a floating contradiction (Poe, *Narrative* 130).<sup>16</sup> In an eerie echo of Geoffrey Crayon’s encounter with the shipwreck, Pym sees this ship at distance. In an uncanny tautology, however, Pym is also on a shipwreck. The men on the brig “appeared to be looking at us” with one man “nodding to us in a cheerful though rather odd way, and smiling constantly, so as to display a set of the most brilliantly white teeth” (131). Poe inverts Crayon’s encounter, bringing its uncanny effect to the level of abjection.<sup>17</sup> The brig itself is a manifestation of the interstitial—both alive and dead. Crayon is on a whole vessel hoping to encounter its mirror, but finds a shipwreck instead. Pym is on a shipwreck hoping to find a whole ship, but instead finds a mirror. That mirror becomes marked by “a stench, such as the whole world has no

name for—no conception of—hellish—utterly suffocating—insufferable, inconceivable” (132). Pym’s stammering style of searching for a word to describe the smell for which there is no name indicates the disintegration of the symbolic around the abject. His sentences break down as he begins to experience the “triple horror” of the moment. That “triple horror” seems to gush from the “most loathsome state of putrefaction,” the apparent gaze it projects onto Pym himself, and the horror Pym has of being devoured.

Pym’s encounter with the corpses (and their smell) decomposes language itself, but that he sees “a huge seagull, busily gorging itself with the horrible flesh, its bill and talons deep buried, and its white plumage spattered all over with blood” recalls his paranoia made manifest: his fear of being eaten. When the bird drops the unidentifiable “clotted and liverlike substance,” cannibalism enters his mind for the first time. It is only with a “deep shudder” that he denies this impulse. He attempts to maintain the borders of himself, but soon learns that the voluntary rejection of his prescriptive identity renders him helpless and borderless. Pym does eventually give into the cannibalism later with his fearful repast of Parker, just as he encounters the putrefying body of Augustus, which also becomes a feast for the sharks, which at times invade the deck of the *Grampus*.

All borders break down. This moment comes to fruition when the smiling captain turns and “looks” at Pym. “The eyes were gone, and the whole flesh around the mouth, leaving the teeth utterly naked. This, then, was the smile which had cheered us on to hope! This the—but I forbear” (Poe, *Narrative* 133). Pym literally is besieged on all sides, and this moment cements his abjection. The putrid corpse bears its teeth threateningly yet without intention, and the skull gazes with unseeing eyes that do not exist and presumably have been devoured. Pym’s final statement about this moment

appears both as a hesitation and an evocation—“but I forbear”; he does not wish to think of the full import of the moment, and therefore calls upon the “I” to resist the abjection he experiences. Too little, too late. In fact, this moment in the narrative confuses whether the “I” refers to Pym or Poe. Pym can only conclude that “it is utterly useless to form conjectures where all is involved, and will, no doubt, remain forever involved, in the most appalling and unfathomable mystery” (134). Even the signifier seems to fall away at this point, with the Real present simply in its unnamable effects.

It is little wonder that Pym moves unintentionally toward the Antarctic cataract. It becomes the psychotopography of nothingness, of the Real experience of abjection. Jon Hauss notes that the experience of the Antarctic in Poe “charts, spatially, the vanishing of space. It is a geography marking the precise point at which geography itself becomes impossible” (149). The landscape of the Antarctic, as Poe’s endnote makes clear, becomes a signifier itself, but it is a signifier that signifies nothing. The canyons that spell out the “Ethiopian verbal root . . . ‘To be shady’” and the Egyptian hieroglyphs and Arabic verbal roots which mean “To be white” and “The region of the south” only serve to undermine signification and “open a wide field for speculation and exciting conjecture” (Poe, *Narrative* 241–242). Speculation, as the corpses of the Dutch brig prove to Pym, only leads further into abjection. Since the maelström “engulfs and destroys all familiar geographies” yet creates “absolutely nothing” (Hauss 156), Pym’s being swallowed by the Antarctic cataract appears as the full realization of abjection (though the text ends before that final, seemingly inevitable moment). Returning to the Platonic chora, Pym finds he has abjected himself into oblivion, into what Leslie Fiedler

describes as “a death without resurrection, a sterile, white womb from which there is no exit” (394).



In his discussion of H. P. Lovecraft’s narrators, Eduardo Haro Ibars asks an intriguing question when he tries to understand their motives—“how do you hate the course of history?” (27). If one sees “the course of history” as a narrative, however, then one can counteract, undermine, and rupture that narrative so as to throw its teleological trajectory into chaos. Perhaps that is why the narration of Edgar Allan Poe’s “MS. Found in a Bottle” (1833) becomes increasingly disjunctive, episodic, and transitory as it progresses. Perhaps that is why its plot appears to dissolve into the imminent moment as the ghost ship flows toward and eventually descends into an Antarctic maelström that emerges from beneath the ice. Perhaps Poe accelerates his narrative in such a way as to subvert what he perceived to be the Boston literary narrative that has been prescribed for him, a narrative he could never fulfill because of his geographic estrangement from the Transcendentalist movement. To attribute that much political ideology to one of Poe’s first published tales does not imply authorial intention. Rather, it implies more of an authorial/cultural narrative effect that manifests itself within an emerging literary genre of an equally emerging nation caught under the shadow of mythic postcolonial self-consciousness.

The events of Poe’s spectral sea narrative are straightforward. Poe’s narrator, wealthy but estranged and restless, boards a ship bound from Java to the Sunda Islands to cure his “nervous restlessness” (“MS.” 624). After a period of dead calm and an abrupt change in weather, a deadly hurricane suddenly swamps the ship, destroying all of the

crew except the narrator and an “old Swede.” For the following “five days and nights,” the ship and its surviving crew are tossed about in the storm and carried “farther to the southward than any previous navigators” (625). Eventually, the narrator and the Swede sight an enormous ship—a Flying Dutchman—riding the crest of an even larger wave that is about to demolish their vessel. The impact of the Dutchman on the narrator’s ship catapults him “upon the rigging of the stranger” (626). After hiding in the hold of the ship, he begins to keep a journal of his observations. While he is on the ship, the narrator encounters the members of the crew, but they refuse to see him or acknowledge his presence. Carried further south by the “influence of some strong current, or impetuous under-tow,” the ship eventually plunges “madly within the grasp of [a] whirlpool” (628–629).

According to Paul Ricoeur, “The plot of a narrative . . . ‘grasps together’ and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole” (x). Poe’s narrative approach in “MS. Found in a Bottle” fractures that schematization in order to return, as much as possible to the “Real” time of the narrator’s abject experience. That return cannot happen unless the narrative folds over itself, forcing a temporal transgression that undermines symbolic representation in narrative by pushing it to its limit. If a coherent plot is “the privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience,” as Ricoeur points out, then the effect of “MS. Found in a Bottle” keeps the reader “confused, unformed, and at the limit” in the temporal experience of the narration (xi).



Poe's narrator tells his readers, "I shall from time to time continue this journal" ("MS." 627). This promise has several implications. On one level, it states that the narrator will sporadically write his observations when he can. On another level, it marks the acceleration and perforation of the narrative into fugitive descriptions a disjunctive present rather than of coherent past events. On still another level, it announces that the narrative is *itself* the manuscript found in a bottle, rather than being a narrative *about* a manuscript found in a bottle; it becomes the thing it describes. As a result, Poe's narrative "journal" literally continues "from time to time"—it moves from a narrative time that recounts the genealogical history of the event to the immanent experiential time of the moment.

Poe's status as a southern writer in the face of the dominant Boston Transcendentalists stymied his efforts to publish in what was the literary heart of the emerging nation, and thus stoked the embers that smoldered from his personal relationship with Boston, what Priscilla Wald terms Poe's "cultural anxiety" (5). Arthur Hobson Quinn notes that "the New England group, Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, and Lowell, who in the twelve years from 1837 to 1849 had become dominant, . . . ruled from Boston, Cambridge, or Concord" (615).<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Silverman notes that the "moral and ethical preoccupations of Transcendentalist thinking, with its long roots in Puritan New England, had little appeal to Poe" because of their "optimism, belief in social progress, their obscurantism, and their moralistic aesthetic views" (265). Considering that Poe viewed the teleological "moralistic aesthetic views" of the Transcendentalists as "Taste on her death-bed," one can see the narrative constraints that he faced, both psychically and professionally. It is little wonder that his works seek to

embody bordering spaces, shifting time, and destructive paradoxes. That the Flying Dutchman descends into “the grasp of a whirlpool” appears appropriate, since the meeting of opposing currents produces it (628–629).

In his discussion of Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” Deleuze notes how Melville uses the agrammatical structure of Bartleby’s reply to “[carve] out a foreign language within a language” (“Bartleby” 71). This “foreign language,” Deleuze states, “runs beneath English and carries it off: it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized” (72). Analogously, Poe’s story, thirty years earlier, describes a field of abjection that outstrips itself, spectralizing the preceding narration. Consequently, the narrative subverts linear time and attacks the teleological representations that absorb it (such as genealogical, geographic, or literary significations). By doing so, Poe effaces the stories that have not yet been written, and affords the subject an annihilating freedom. Elizabeth Grosz points out that time “disappears in our representations, whether scientific or artistic, historical or contemporary, where it is tied to, bound up in, and represented by means of space and spatiality. It suffers, or produces, a double displacement: from becoming to being, and from temporal to spatial” (2). Through accelerating his narrative, Poe collapses time and prevents that displacement. He preserves the narrative as an abject becoming by inhibiting its absorption into representation.

Donald Stauffer notes how the story shifts in style from the “plausible” to the “arabesque,” noting “Poe has managed to give his tale psychological depth by marking the progression of the narrator’s disintegration of mind with a corresponding progression of style” (108, 120). Stauffer’s thematic conclusions about Poe’s change in style appear more like symptoms of an attempt to hollow out signification. “MS. Found in a Bottle” is

not a story with a teleological theme; the narration ends too abruptly for it to have one. In addition, there is no resolution, no character development. There is only the imminent experiential terror that accelerates from moment to moment as the tale progresses, ghosting any of the preceding narration and pushing the current words to their narrative limit. Stauffer's analysis of the tale provides an interesting structural framework that helps to highlight the point of acceleration in the narrative. He breaks the tale into its 27 paragraphs and shows how "the mingling of the . . . styles forms an alternating pattern, heavily plausible at the outset and heavily arabesque at the end" (119). The story shifts from being a coherent, memory-based narrative (what Stauffer calls "plausible") to a fragmented present ("arabesque") at paragraph 14. Yet Stauffer's terms—"plausibility" and its complement "verisimilitude"—have a relation to the idea of "truth" rather than of time or immanence. "Truth" relates more to what Poe wrote against, the Transcendentalist moral teleology as it manifested itself in literature. Poe's narrative seeks to obscure truth and move the narrative from transcendence to transgression.

In paragraph 14, the narrator begins in the distant past tense by saying "*It is long since* I first trod the deck of this terrible ship" ("MS." 627, emphasis added). He then moves on to say,

*It was not long ago* that I ventured into the captain's cabin, and took thence the materials with which *I write*, and *have written*. *I shall from time to time* continue this journal. It is true that *I may not find* an opportunity of transmitting it to the world, but *I will not fail* to make the endeavour. *At the last moment* I will enclose the MS. in a bottle and cast it within the sea. (627, emphasis added)

The narration moves from the distant past, to the recent past, to the present, to the indefinite present perfect, to the future, to the conditional future, back to the future, and up to the "last moment" in four sentences. The narrative time of the story begins to impel itself and the reader forward with the same velocity that the narrator is hurled onto

the Dutchman. Moreover, the “last moment” exists in the future of the narrative, indicating that the narration has reached its limit and has begun to paradoxically fold over itself, since the “last moment” can also be the one that has just come before the present moment.

Effectively this strategy collapses time so that “Things succeed each other in diverse times, but they are also simultaneous in the same time, and they subsist in an indeterminate time” (Deleuze, “On Four” 28). Thus the tale accelerates out of time, to what François Peraldi terms “mythical time” and what Michael Warner calls, in discussing Irving’s works, “pirate time” (Peraldi 339; Warner 798). It is “the kind of time psychotic subjects are sometimes trapped in for longer or shorter periods, which they can measure . . . only once they are capable of symbolizing their experience (Peraldi 339–340). It is in this time that “markers of historicity do not move in progressive secular time. Remnants of the past surface as uncanny interruptions, decay happens at uneven rates, and whole eras seem embalmed in parallel temporalities” (Warner 798). Though Peraldi associates his term with the Lacanian Imaginary, Poe’s narrative brings that time and overlaps it with the Real by transforming the tale into the actual artifact, causing it to be an “uncanny interruption.” Thus, the narrative time moves from mythic time through fictional time while it pressures the borders of historical time. The tale therefore expresses the time of the abject. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* takes on this pattern of narrative time as well in the final chapter, as Pym drifts towards the cataract.

Just before this narrative shift, at the start of the journal/epistolary style of the narration, the narrator experiences “a sensation which will admit of no analysis, to which

the lessons of by-gone time are inadequate, and for which I fear futurity itself will offer me no key” (Poe, “MS.” 627). The narrator moves from the hierarchical, sequential time to an abject compression of time where “Permanence, succession, and simultaneity . . . are fragments [éclats] of time” (Deleuze, “On Four” 28). Poe plays with the narrative time, hastening it as the events become jumbled to the point where ontological readings (such as those that might reveal a theme or “moral”) become not only impossible, but also useless and irrelevant. In so doing the narrative becomes an involuted “Aeon”—an imminent present that exists within “the indefinite time of the event, the floating line that knows only speeds and continually divides that which transpires into an already-there that is at the same time not-yet-here, a simultaneous too-late and too-early, a something that is both going to happen and has just happened” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 262).

This narrative style preserves the dialogical aspect of the narrative, rendering it unstable as a representational narration. What marks Poe’s text is that it remains a narrative of contradictions on multiple levels. Yet, such contradictions do not negate each other as much as they free the narration to catch up with itself. The tale’s epigraph, for example, comes from Philippe Quinault: “Qui n’a plus qu’un moment à vivre / N’a plus rien à dissimuler” (Poe, “MS.” 623).<sup>19</sup> The idea that one “has only one more moment to live” hints at the imminent temporality of the ending of the tale, and that there is “nothing more to dissimulate” undercuts the pretext of the story. The “MS. Found in a Bottle” is itself a fiction, a dissimulation. Moreover, it is a dissimulation that the acceleration of the narrative strips away on one level, and reaffirms on another. Consider the title of the tale. Harold Beaver notes that it “operates as a stage direction, framing

theatrical imagery” (“Doodling” 36). Yet, this aspect of the title does not become apparent until the fourteenth paragraph of the story, when the narrator reveals that he will “from time to time continue this journal” (Poe, “MS.” 627).

The narrator states in the opening sentence, “Of my country and my family I have little to *say*” (623, emphasis added). That the story invokes speech implies, at first, that the narrator is living and present to *tell* the story, much like the confessional style of Poe’s other tales. Even so, the narrator still only has “little to say”; he is in the process of receding from the imposed structure of the symbolic order. Moreover, like most of Poe’s narrators, he has indeterminate origins—he has erased or refuses to represent his own past to the reader and thus to himself. The narrator goes on to say he is a skeptic, “lest the incredible *tale* I have to *tell* should be considered rather the raving of a crude imagination . . .” (emphasis added). Thus, one would presume from the title that the tale is *about* a manuscript found in a bottle. The reader’s assumption, then, becomes the dissimulation as the narrative accelerates—the narrative shift forces the tale to become the very subject of its title.

The first part of the narration, with its emphasis on “telling,” imparts a imminent “conversational” presence of the author while it recounts a coherent sequence of past events—from boarding the freighter to being hurled onto the Dutchman. As the narrative accelerates to the present moment after paragraph 13, its emphasis on the materiality of the text, that is, its continual references to writing rather than telling and its becoming the manuscript itself, ghosts the existence of the narrator as a voice from the past. As Jon Hauss puts it, “Poe would keep us conscious . . . that the writer of ‘MS.’ was erased . . . *at the very moment he surrendered his text to others.* When we read his words, he is

necessarily . . . already dead” (155). The same assumption happens in *Pym*, but in a more subtle way. Though Pym’s final words in the narration are not necessarily his last, he is dead by the time we read them, as Poe’s ending note indicates. Yet the preface leads the reader to believe that Pym is still alive, since he introduces the narration. Thus, though Pym may have survived the events of the narrative, he does not survive the composition of the text, leaving both his survival and his death unexplained.

Poe preferred to have such an effect in his writing, as he states in “The Philosophy of Composition,” a literary work should not be “too long to be read at one sitting,” lest it “dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression” (979). Poe’s “unity of impression” has nothing to do with homogeneity or transcendence. Rather, it is a form of writerly becoming on an emotive level that forces the reader to share the literal moment with the narrator. Roland Barthes uses the term “writerly” (*scriptible*) to describe a text that is “a productive (and no longer a representative) one” that exists as “a perpetual present, upon which no language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed” (*S/Z* 5). To use Barthes’s description to describe Poe’s early short story might seem excessive, but Poe’s “MS. Found in a Bottle” is not a complete “writerly” text. Rather, it accelerates in its present narration in order to become one. It is a narrative textual becoming.<sup>20</sup> Jon Hauss notes that “The writer of the ‘MS.’ tells us that we will never know which: either our discoveries of meaning are glimpses into a grand poetical design . . . or they are imaginary constructions pieced together from random fragments floated our way through ‘ungoverned chance’” (144). Either way, one cannot construct a teleological narrative of representation from the “discoveries of meaning” the tale imparts.

Haus's observations reflect Poe's own conceptions about "a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of a single sitting" ("Philosophy" 980). In fact, Poe points out that with "certain classes of prose composition"—those that "[demand] no unity" this "limit may be advantageously overpassed." Poe argues for a literature of the moment. Certain prose (Poe uses the example of *Robinson Crusoe*) may exceed the limit because they are episodic—they are what Barthes would call "the novelistic without the novel" (*S/Z* 5). Such prose demands no unity because it is already comprised of multiple unities. This narrative style appears to be, as Deleuze terms it, "the language of the Whale" ("Bartleby" 72). Such a comparison makes sense considering the staccato-style narrative of *Moby-Dick*, itself seemingly written in the same world as Pym's *Narrative*—a style that is pioneered in America by the earlier fantastic sea-fictions of Poe. What "Bartleby" does with language, then, it seems "MS. Found in a Bottle" does with narrative—pushes it to its representational limit so that things "remain enigmatic yet nonarbitrary: in short, a new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life and death without leading us back to reason" (82). Reason leads to genealogy, ontology, and teleology, constructing a "truth" or moral that constrains and restricts interpretive flows with its structures, imprisoning the subject within the defiles of the symbolic.

Poe's narrator describes his situation on the Dutchman at one point by stating, "We are surely doomed to hover upon the brink of Eternity" ("MS." 628). The fate of the narrator becomes the fate of the reader. The reader can only follow the narration up to its limit, never reaching a climax or a conclusion. In discussing the agrammaticality of *Bartleby*, Deleuze argues that "its abrupt termination, NOT TO, which leaves what it



rejects undetermined, confers upon it the character of a radical, a kind of limit-function” (68). That “limit-function” of Poe’s short story creates an aporia as it folds into itself. That aporic becoming of narration “places us in relation with something unknowable and imperceptible . . . because it speaks of a past about which it can no longer provide us knowledge” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 193). It makes sense, given Deleuze’s observations about the detective novel, that Poe has been credited with the founding of the genre. Yet more important to notice is how Poe conflates temporal and signifying narrative elements in the becoming narrative of the short story, particularly “Ms. Found in a Bottle.” Poe’s short story narrative has both the “fundamental relation to *secrecy* . . . the form of the secret, which remains impenetrable” of the novella and the “relation to *discovery* . . . the form of discovery” of the tale.

These two elements are best illustrated by a moment from the story. Poe’s narrator “unwittingly [daubs] the edges of a neatly folded studding-sail” (“MS.” 627). When the sail is “bent upon the ship . . . the thoughtless touches of the brush are spread out into the word DISCOVERY.” This event forces the narrator to consider whether “such things are the operation of ungoverned chance.” Poe never allows for an answer, just as he never writes an editorial introduction of how the manuscript came to be found—to do so would be to destroy the narrative becoming that the story manifests. What he does offer, however, is the experiential aporia that results from an accelerating collapse of signifier and signified. The signifier “DISCOVERY” accelerates to become its signified—the word becomes a discovery unfolded on the sail. Yet, the narrator, in his discovery, discovers nothing, or rather, he reaches the limit of discovery. Such an instance undoes the logos and discloses the abject.

For Poe, reaching the limit of the narration, convoluting signifier and signified so that the representational system becomes meaning-less, is a form of narrative forgetting that amplifies the narratively present moment. “MS. Found in a Bottle” telescopes into a narrative becoming of “antimemory” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 21). Hence, systems of representation begin to break down as the narrative accelerates to the present, or rather, they expand to include gaps that undo those systems. The narrator states that the crew “muttered . . . in a low broken tone, some words of a language which I could not understand” (“MS.” 626). Later on, he is “aghast at the warring of wind and ocean, to convey any idea of which the words tornado and simoom are trivial and ineffective” (628). These words are not “ineffective” when Poe uses them earlier in the narration—“every appearance warranted me in apprehending a Simoom” (624). The term is misapplied; the narrator uses it to describe a hurricane rather than the dry desert wind it represents. Language, as a form of representation, disintegrates as the narration accelerates. Even the abbreviation “MS.” in the title obscures the meaning of the document it represents—one can apply it to both “message” and “manuscript.”

This shift, which the narrator finds difficult to comprehend, seems why the Dutchman is so well suited to traveling in abject space, allowing it to “[bear] up under press of sail in the very teeth of that supernatural sea, and of that ungovernable hurricane” (“MS.” 626). Indeed, when the narrator first spots the Dutchman it hovers “upon the very verge of the precipitous decent,” riding the crest of a wave while also being able to “hove in stays”—that is, it is able to move freely, to “go about” as it rides upon the edge. Furthermore, the narrator notes of the ship, “what she *is not*, I can easily perceive—what she *is* I fear it is impossible to say” (627). The Dutchman defies representation, keeping

its purpose unknown. Indeed, even the body of the ship is constructed with gaps in its hull. The narrator notes the “extreme *porousness*” that renders it “unfit to the purpose to which it has been applied.” The Dutchman is a floating fractal, similar to the Sierpensky’s sponge Deleuze and Guattari cite as a mathematical becoming. The Dutchman has dimensions “that are fractional rather than a whole” (486–487). If the ship is “less than a volume and more than a surface,” then similarly Poe’s story is more than a tale and less than a novella—or rather, it is more than a moment but less than a narrative. It exists in a literary “*zone of indiscernibility* proper to ‘becoming’” (488). It is a hermaphrodite narrative.

That the story is a sea-narrative reflects its representational transgression, then, because as Deleuze and Guattari point out, “the sea is a smooth space par excellence,” even if it one of the first spaces to encounter representation or “strict striation” (*Thousand Plateaus* 479). The Dutchman does not appear to codify the sea, given its “decayed charts of navigation” (“MS. 626), “mouldering instruments of science, and obsolete long-forgotten charts” (628). The story does not seek to map that territory but rather, through its descriptions, keeps it shrouded as a geographical becoming. It is a world of flow, “strong current,” and “impetuous undertow” with “chaos of foamless water” and “stupendous ramparts of ice, towering away into the desolate sky . . . looking like the walls of the universe” (628). Poe brings his readers to the edge of representation, undermining both geographical and literary representation, projecting the psychotopography of the abject.

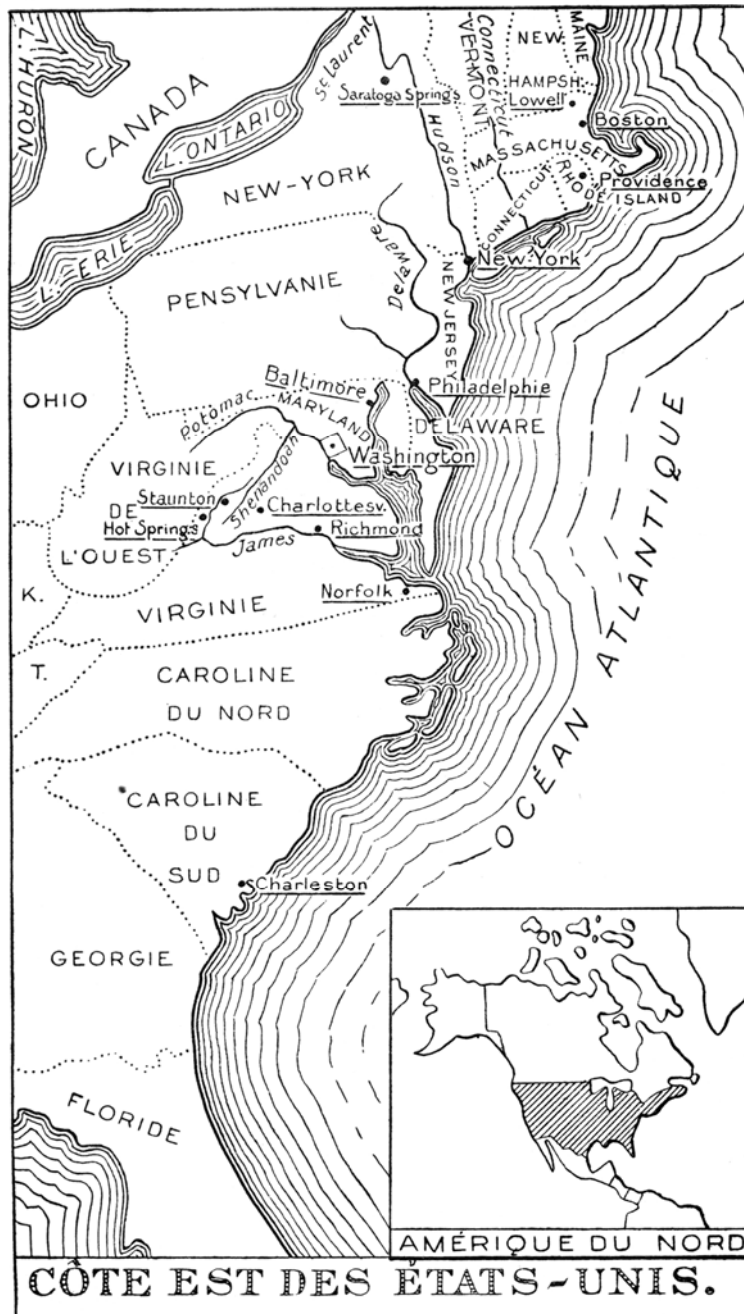
The tale must halt in the maelström, as Hauss notes, because “the maelström is where our geography ends, in perfect and absolute nothingness, before some new

geography's efflorescence" (146). But the tale cannot reach the maelström—the marine event produced of flows and void—without first accelerating the narrative so that its meaning becomes meaningless. The narrative strips away the ontological and teleological elements of narrative to carve out a literary space for itself that is between the thing and its representation, the moment and its narration, the instant and its chronology, the place and its geography.

It would be incorrect to say that Poe intended to create this literary milieu. Rather, he fled to it from the systems of representation that confined him and he began to burrow underneath them to enlarge it. "At a time when James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and many other American writers and painters were creating a feeling of space and self-reliant freedom," Silverman observes, "[Poe] was creating . . . a mythology of enclosure, constriction, and victimization" (228). By collapsing sequential and coherent time, Poe attacks foundations of the systems of representation that constrained him. That he did it with the sea-narrative imparted a new milieu for the literary genre of the short story, and created a map for literary production founded—foundering—on the abject: imminent, looming space.

## Notes

1. The frontispiece of Marie Bonaparte's *Edgar Poe: Étude psychanalytique* (1933):



2. The translators of *Anti-Oedipus* note that the “French word *manque* may mean both lack and need in a psychological sense, as well as want or privation of scarcity in an economic sense” (28). During most of his life, Poe seemed to suffer from many if not all

of the definitions of this French term. Such a situation would account for his search for multiple lines of escape from its prescriptive implications.

3. Deleuze and Guattari describe “antiproduction” as a process that “falls back on (*se rabat sur*) the forces of production and appropriates them. It is never primary; production is never organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack (*manque*). It is lack that infiltrates itself, creates empty spaces or vacuoles, and propagates itself on accordance with the organization of an already existing organization of production” (*Anti-Oedipus* 28). They base their definition on the somewhat counter-Lacanian premise that “Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression” (26). “Lack,” they clarify, “is a countereffect of desire; it is deposited, distributed, vacuolized within a real that is natural and social” (27).

4. The idea of the “New World” or the concept of a “new Eden” envisioned the American landscape as one that was virgin—an undiscovered realm that had been paradoxically re-found during a voyage that was also a form of return.

5. A term used by Jehlen to represent the ideology that the land and geography of America comes to represent the nation and its inhabitants. Such thinking is a driving force behind Emerson’s “Nature,” as well as the idea of “Manifest Destiny.”

6. Leverenz observes that Ralph Waldo Emerson, after being “demolished” in public by a “snippersnapper” from the South, wrote “Their [southerners’] question respecting any man is like a Seminole’s, How can he fight? In this country, we ask, What can he do?” (“Poe” 217). Leverenz goes on to say that Emerson’s phrase establishes an “us/them” dichotomy in the North—“New England, or ‘we,’ represents the only true country.”

7. One might recall Thomas Jefferson’s famous observation in a letter to William Stephens Smith, dated November 13, 1787: “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure” (356). Jefferson’s sentiments seem like instructions for the perpetuation of the Oedipal cycle, interestingly grounded in a landscaping metaphor.

8. “*hic et nunc*”: The “here and now”—the place of the word within what Lacan terms the “*insistence* of the signifying chain” (“Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” 28).

9. Essentially a misapplication of a word or phrase, or a strained metaphor, catachresis takes on Savoy’s extended definition in relation to the gothic: the signification of “a figure for which there exists no precise literal referent, merely a ‘something’ that can appear verbally in no other way” (171). If applied along with Kristeva’s ideas, catachresis is the striving for an expression of the abject, one that will continually suffer slippage in translation during signification.

10. The tale Barthes analyzes is “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” (1845).

11. “Deterritorialization,” a term used extensively by Deleuze and Guattari, refers to a practice (or practices) of fleeing dialectical codifications and prescriptive teleologies, especially those determined by institutional definitions.
12. It should be noted here that in these tales Dupin may have a name, but his companion (the narrator of the tales) remains nameless. Moreover, in “A Descent into the Maelström” the fisherman may have what may be considered a name, but the narrator who narrates the fisherman’s account does not.
13. Young America was a group of literary nationalists who encouraged the use of American themes and settings in their works.
14. It seems worthwhile to note that “Pym” seems to be a play on the word “imp,” which besides its mischievous implications also implies a graft or suture (in relation to the roots of a plant). Thus, it may be that Pym’s identity (signified by his name) is tenuous and shaky at best. In fact, Pym does not even share the same name as his grandfather, Mr. Peterson. It is this grandfather that offers the most confrontational paternal authority to Pym as he plans to embark on the *Grampus*.
15. Poe first published *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in 1838. Its events take place ten years earlier.
16. Poe’s choice of the word “hermaphrodite” to describe the approaching ship carries with it the connotation of being designed with contradictory elements as well as being intended for contradictory purposes. There is, of course, the gendered implication of the term as well; a hermaphrodite is a subject born with both sets of sex organs and secondary sex characteristics.
17. In Chapter Two of this study, I discuss how Washington Irving’s character of Geoffrey Crayon encounters the wrecked mast of a ship and becomes haunted by that image during a storm later that night.
18. Quinn does note that Lowell was the only one who was positive and receptive to Poe’s literary work, but this feeling had “cooled decidedly by 1848” (615).
19. Levine translates this epigram as “He who has only a moment longer to live / Has no longer anything to conceal” (630). “Dissimulate” seems a more fitting translation of “dissimuler” because of its added implications of façade rather than mere concealment. In addition, the words share the same Latin root, “simul,” meaning “at the same time” and a cognate of “simulare,” meaning “to represent, to copy”
20. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is Poe’s only novel, and despite its length it remains sufficiently episodic in its style to remain a narrative textual becoming.

CHAPTER 4  
TEXTUAL PROJECTIONS: HAWTHORNE AND  
NEW ENGLAND MATERIAL HISTORY

Nathaniel Hawthorne's expression of the Gothic is rooted in the binding of his personal history with his national history. Hawthorne even shared a birthday with his nation, but his prominent yet tainted colonial paternal ancestry arguably haunted him the most. Like Poe, who in *Pym* was fleeing Edgartown, Hawthorne had reason to seek a break with his familial signifier. Hawthorne added the "w" to his name in young adulthood, perhaps to make it "read the way it sounded" as well as to emphasize his "patriarchal 'hawthorne tree' roots in his father's family history" (Leverenz, *Manhood* 8). Hawthorne's emphasis of those roots reveals them only so that he might attack them better and wrestle with his paternal ghosts on an even field. Having lost his seaman father and namesake to yellow fever at the age of three, Hawthorne seemed never to reconcile fully his father's disappearance with the persistently present shadow of his great-great-great-grandfather Major William Hathorne (1607–1681) and his great-great-grandfather John Hathorne (1641–1717).

Hawthorne's father was a sailor who left Salem in 1807 for Surinam and died before he could return. As Edwin Haviland Miller points out, "No one from the family having witnessed the coffin or the burial, the father was in effect unburied" (26). Like the fearful widow in Geoffrey Crayon's musings about the shipwreck, Hawthorne had no mementos of his absent father until twelve years later, when he was given Captain



Nathaniel Hawthorne's logbooks. Interestingly enough, as Miller points out, the teenage Hawthorne

wrote his name experimentally at many places in the books, spelling it Hathorne as well as Hawthorne, wavering indecisively . . . as he sought to establish his own identity, which meant freeing himself from three Hathornes, who were predetermining his course. (26)

Five years later the author would finally resolve to change his name, but the mementos of his father appear to have been at least in part a catalyst for that change. Hawthorne grew up in view of the Charter Street Burying Point in Salem, where his infamous great-great-grandfather, Judge John Hathorne, lay buried. His paternal grandfather Daniel Hathorne also rests in the Burying Point. As a result, the gap between an infamous paternal presence and non-presence seems to account for part of Hawthorne's ambivalent relationship to his hometown as well as his heritage.

Salem and the Hathornes played an intricate part in the history of the United States that obliterated any illusion of a new Eden in Salem or the rest of the country. In fact, that history was marked by the Salem Witch Trials, which illustrated for Hawthorne the innate propensity of the human heart for darkness and violence. As a result, the author would merge his attempts to wrest himself free of both a tainted paternal past and a colonial national past, a neurotic endeavor which manifests itself in perhaps the most gothic of genres—the haunted house. But Hawthorne's houses appear as loci for a link with the past as he experienced it. The ghosts that haunt the House of the Seven Gables and the Boston Province House project themselves from within his sense of an ambivalent colonial past, and as a result they express a conflicted admiration of, and yet a rebellion against, that past.

Consequently, the subtle gothic style which emerges from this identity conflict, both national and psychological, takes the reader “across the threshold of the gruesome doorway into an ‘imagined nation’ of [Hawthorne’s] own devising” (Uruburu 47). That “imagined nation” still continues to haunt the reader because, though it confronts the two different layers of colonial past, it never fully resolves the conflict. In order to affirm his presence as an American author, Hawthorne must try to cast off his colonial British roots. To do so results in the glorification of his Puritan ancestors, who were just as autocratic in their governance of Salem and Boston. As a result, Hawthorne’s search for and of an American identity moves from the colonially oppressive to the personally repressive, leaving his “imagined nation” neurotically-valenced and projected onto the physical objects in his environment. Indeed, Miller observes that “he followed a map of Salem which derived, as it were, from the map of his internal landscape and led him usually to five destinations: the harbor, the rocky coastline, Gallows Hill, the Charter Street Burying point, and the Salem almshouse.” (16). These physical places in Salem embody a sense of the past for Hawthorne, a physical link to his and the nation’s past, which enables him to confront and attempt to lay his ghosts to rest through his textual mediations.

Those ghosts will not rest, and they return in the places they inhabited in the form of projection. As Freud explains in *Totem and Taboo*,

This defensive procedure, which is a common one both in normal and in pathological mental life, is known as “projection.” The survivor thus denies that he has ever harboured any hostile feelings against the dead loved one; the soul of the dead harbours them instead and seeks to put them into action during the whole period of mourning. (77)

Yet Hawthorne never fully stopped mourning, and it appears at times he mourns the loss of his ability to read his ancestors without the interference of history. In his brief sketch “Foot-prints on the Sea Shore” (1838) he observes,

One huge rock ascends in monumental shape, with a face like a giant's tombstone, on which the veins resemble inscriptions, but in an unknown tongue. We will fancy them the forgotten characters of an antediluvian race; or else nature's own hand has here recorded a mystery, which, could I read her language, would make mankind the wiser and the happier. Pass on, and leave it unexplained. (564)

It seems that history, manifest in the “giant's tombstone,” has rendered incomprehensible the message that object has to tell, and Hawthorne remains haunted both by its ambivalent presence and his inability to interpret it. In fact, the “giant's tombstone” echoes the image of his great-great grandfather's grave in the Charter Street Burying Point. Hawthorne comes to view his ancestors in Salem as being part of the land itself, since they have “mingled their earthly substance with the soil; until no small portion of it must necessarily be akin to the mortal frame wherewith . . . I walk the streets” (*Scarlet* 126).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, his attempts to narrate that gap, to account for his presence in Salem in a manner other than the one with which he has been forced to wrestle by the imposing presence of these physical reminders of his heritage, give rise to his romantic gothic visions that center themselves in specific geographies and focus on specific physical realities within those borders.

Hawthorne's historical consciousness extended to his environment, and his encounters with that history appear gothic in their nature, yet non-threatening in their scope. It almost seems that Hawthorne's ghosts are just as incapable of interpreting their effect on the present as Hawthorne is incapable of fully comprehending the past. The one thing that they both have in common is the prominence of a physical place or object—be it a house, a street, or a painting—which acts as a conduit for an imagined experience with history. Since the experience must necessarily be an imagined one, Hawthorne continually fails in his quest to interpret the past because it always remains in the realm of the fantastic. Ultimately, the reader retains a double doubt, remaining unsure whether

the gothic effect of Hawthorne's narratives stem from the presence of the past, or from Hawthorne's inability to fully comprehend that presence.

The physical persistence of an antique object marks off the boundaries of an historical narrative with a form of proprietary inaccessibility, therefore dividing the subject from the object's history and denying the subject full access to that history. As a result, the psychological encounter with physical history takes on elements similar to the alienation of a postcolonial experience, and that postcolonial experience becomes an historical one. Michael J. Colacurcio notes that,

evidently, Hawthorne 'believed in' the power of the past; arguably, he even felt 'trapped' by it. That, in all its locality, was the really real, against which all possible futures . . . figured as merely ideal. And even his own present . . . would seem most potent as an incipient past: the individual might constitute himself by recalling an experience whose *present* form he never had been quite competent to grasp; and a people might look back on a formative influence. (483)

For Hawthorne, it seems, physical forms of history manifest themselves as the source of an identity narrative that is both national and personal. In his "Custom House" sketch, the author floats between first person and third-person narration when referencing himself. Though it may appear as a pretense of over-civility, Hawthorne's narrative technique gives away his double self-consciousness, his thinking of his past and his present simultaneously.

It appears that Hawthorne almost felt forced to view himself as pre-antiqued—as a character in an emerging historical narrative over which he had only partial control. His Puritan ancestors predetermined part of his role because of their place in the colonial history of America, and through his texts he negotiates this narrativization of himself. He may sound self-mocking when he says of the Salem Custom House, "And here, some six months ago,—pacing from corner to corner . . . —you might have recognized, honored

reader, the same individual who welcomed you into his cheery little study,” yet he later implies that that man, though a “figurative self,” is actually a ghost (*Scarlet* 125, 155). Hawthorne’s public Custom House self seems to him “like Irving’s Headless Horseman; ghastly and grim, and longing to be buried.”

The comparison makes light of the politics involved in his dismissal from the Salem Custom House, but in the context of the rest of the sketch one sees more of a symptom of Hawthorne’s thought process as a whole. He describes himself as “a gentleman who writes from beyond the grave” where the “life of the Custom House lies like a dream behind me” (*Scarlet* 156). Thus, Hawthorne paints himself as a living ghost within the Custom House, a ghost that now exists there as does Surveyor Pue, “the obscurely seen, but majestic, figure” whose “ghostly hand” and “ghostly voice” impel Hawthorne “on the sacred consideration of my filial duty” to give voice to the found material object (and its accompanying manuscript) of the scarlet letter (146–147). In this moment of the narrative, Hawthorne refashions himself as the bearer of historical narrative impelled by ghosts of the past—those of the fictional Hester Prynne and of the very real Jonathan Pue, Esq. What reanimates these ghosts is a physical object that cannot be fully interpreted—“this rag of scarlet cloth” which “assumed the shape of a letter” (145). Like the inscrutable “giant’s tombstone” the letter signifies without narrative; it simply is, and its presence provides an incomplete link to the past: “how it was to be worn, or what rank, honor, and dignity, in by-past times, were signified by it, was a riddle which . . . I saw little hope of solving.” The “deep meaning” embodied in it “[communicates] itself to [Hawthorne’s] sensibilities, but [evades] the analysis of [his] mind” (145–146).

As a result, Hawthorne tells his reader that his “imagination was a tarnished mirror. It would not reflect, or only with miserable dimness, the figures with which I did my best to people it. . . . [they] retained all the rigidity of dead corpses, and stared me in the face with a fixed and ghastly grin of contemptuous defiance” (*Scarlet* 148). Faced with the presence of the past, Hawthorne cannot express it because he cannot fully comprehend his place in relation to it. The visual imagery of the past gazing back at him in an almost mocking manner reminds one of the helplessness of Geoffrey Crayon and Arthur Gordon Pym, yet for Hawthorne that impervious past is the foundation of his national and personal identity. Having trouble articulating his relation to the past—both national and personal—Hawthorne simply feels it, then embodies that feeling in a physical object that may be experienced as an aestheticized uncanny encounter of material reality, so that “all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect” (149). When he places the scarlet letter against his chest, though there is no narrative, “it seemed to me,—the reader may smile, but must not doubt my word,—it seemed to me, then, that I experienced a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heat; and as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red hot iron. I shuddered, and involuntarily let it fall upon the floor” (146).

Hawthorne’s experience with the physical object appears almost as a phantom pain, akin to what many amputees feel after the loss of a limb. Elaine Scarry, in her exploration of pain and torture in *The Body in Pain*, points out that pain “comes into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed” (4).<sup>2</sup> To say that Hawthorne expressed a physical pain in relation to his past would be extreme,

but his neurotic anxiety over his conflicted sentiments about his heritage is analogously irreducible. In order to affirm his American voice and claim a place for himself in history, he must in some part seek to throw off the rule of the British monarchy, or at least the influence of colonial British consciousness. At the same time, to do so commemorates his Puritan ancestry in Salem, tainted with the innocent blood spilt during the Salem Witch Trials as well as with an intolerance for an antinomian and individualist outlook. Unlike Irving, who can look to the New York Dutch as a mythic pre-colonial alternative to the colonizing British identity, Hawthorne has no cultural safe haven, and instead attempts to dwell in the “neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. Ghosts may enter here, without affrighting us” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet* 149). This ambivalent and uncanny, yet non-threatening, space of his tales serves as a gentlemanly gothic heterotopia for Hawthorne’s psychotopography, expressing a cultural anxiety without inflicting it directly on the reader.

Yet expressing his cultural anxiety requires Hawthorne to make it tangible, to project it. In discussing her concept of “analogical substantiation” as it relates to pain, Scarry notes that objects give both a sense of agency to its cause, and “because it has shape, length, and color, because it exists . . . or can be pictured as existing . . . at the external boundary of the body, it begins to externalize, objectify, and make shareable what is originally an interior and unsharable experience” (15–16). As a result, the inexpressible becomes expressible, even if only imperfectly. Moreover, projecting that anxiety onto an external physical world imparts an agency to the object, but one that can be experienced and expressed only as uncanny for two reasons. First, the subject cannot

deny that anxiety nor can its observer confirm it. The act of analogical substantiation splits the difference in the form of catachresis, forcing both subject and witness to experience the same, if incomplete, neurotic effect. Second, the inanimate object, acting as an agent of that experience, must necessarily become animate either as an entity itself or as the topos of spirits. Either way, in this manner the object comes “alive.” Freud describes this *uncanny* effect as produced by “effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes” (“Uncanny” 152). In essence it is the return of the repressed insistently seeking a new voice or vital physical presence.

Elaine Scarry argues, “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). Scarry’s observations about the effects of pain on language echo Kristeva’s ideas of psychological abjection. Freud’s argument that part of the Uncanny as the return of the repressed occurs when the symbol takes over the “full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes” seems to be the counter-action of pain (“Uncanny” 152). It appears to seek a means to represent that pain (in Hawthorne’s case, his repressed anxiety about his national and paternal identity), but that symbolic release is at best neutral. Hence, Hawthorne knowingly relates his concern that his reader will not fully comprehend his experience when he notes that “the reader may smile” as he describes the heat of the scarlet letter upon his chest (*Scarlet* 146). What the red cloth imparts to Hawthorne about



Hester Prynne and Surveyor Pue, the Salem Custom House now imparts to the reader about Hawthorne.

Essentially, Hawthorne's use of material objects to evoke effects of the Uncanny stems from the return of his repressed, because it is structured as a metaphor in the Lacanian sense of the term (Lacan, "Instance" 148–149, 150).<sup>3</sup> Hawthorne not only viewed history in this manner, but also constructed his self-image as he saw it projected in his surroundings. In an oft-quoted letter written to Sophia Peabody on October 4, 1840, Hawthorne describes his room in the house in 10 Herbert Street:

This deserves to be called a haunted chamber; for thousands upon thousands of visions have appeared to me in it; and some few of them have become visible to the world. If ever I should have a biographer, he ought to make great mention of this chamber in my memoirs, because so much of my lonely youth was wasted here, and here my mind and character were formed; . . . and here I sat a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me . . . (*Selected Letters* 79)

To know the room at 10 Herbert Street, according to Hawthorne, is somehow to understand him better—to be more in tune with his psychology and struggle for a voice. But to visit that room is to visit a “haunted chamber,” a phrasing which suggests that some part of Hawthorne still remains in the room along with his “thousands of visions” seeking a voice.

In still another letter, dated January 20, 1842, Hawthorne amplifies this outlook on his “haunted chamber” to an almost comic degree. “To this chamber,” he writes, “doubtless, in all succeeding ages, pilgrims will come to pay their tribute of reverence; . . . ‘There,’ they will exclaim, ‘is the very bed in which he slumbered, and where he was visited by those ethereal visions, which he afterwards fixed forever in glowing words!’” (*Selected Letters* 99). His letter continues in a “catalogue” of various objects, from “wash-stand” to “worn-out shoe brush,” each accompanied with a vision of what he used

to do and how that was connected to his writing. Oddly enough, Hawthorne's vision was prophetic, considering the manner in which the Salem Custom House has become a museum in his memory, as have the House of the Seven Gables and his birthplace. Yet despite his mocking tone, Hawthorne reveals both how he hoped to be remembered as well as how he interacted with the physical objects that surrounded him. Since history is born with subjectivity, one must start with the subject; and Hawthorne certainly projected an incipient historical significance—both mocking and serious—on his own place in that narrative. If he could envision the various ghostly historical imports associated with different personal objects, and even the present appearing as an incipient past, then the town of Salem itself—from the burying point to Gallows Hill to the House of the Seven Gables—must have also carried an historical weight for him. As the first male of his family born in the newly established United States as well as one of its emerging literary voices, Hawthorne must have experienced the same effect while walking around Boston.

Hawthorne's envisioning of the past from a physical presence might account for the somewhat compounded gothic narration in "Alice Doane's Appeal" (1835). Hawthorne, writing as a narrativized version of himself, narrates his trip to Gallows Hill in Salem with two female auditors.<sup>4</sup> He then recounts a tale of both Alice Doane and her brothers and how he recounted that tale. Thus, the story is as much about how Hawthorne constructs his fictions as it is about the fictions themselves. It has been speculated that "Alice Doane's Appeal," along with other works as "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "The Gentle Boy," were to make up a planned collection entitled *Provincial Tales* inspired by Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* (Miller 93). What marks these tales, and much of Hawthorne's fiction, is that they are postcolonial tales writing about a colonial

condition and its two distinct phases—Puritan and Pre-Revolutionary. Part imagined landscape, part actual locality, “Alice Doane’s Appeal” remains for Hawthorne as “a trial whether truth were more powerful than fiction” (“Alice” 215).

The narrator of “Alice Doane’s Appeal” leads his two companions to Gallows Hill because “the direction of our course” was left to him (205). The narration blends its layers, resulting in slight ambiguous moments where the referent of the narration begins to slide between the present and the past. An example of this temporal slippage exists in his uses of the plural first-person, namely “we” and “our.” Since Hawthorne is the author of the text, indeed the “direction of our course” is left to him, and like his narrator, he leads his audience “neither to Legge’s Hill, nor to the Cold Spring, nor to the rude shores and old Batteries of the Neck, nor yet to Paradise.” Instead, he leads his reader through a brief narration of the travel itself, until in the last line of the paragraph he reveals, “this was the field where superstition won her darkest triumph; the high place where our fathers set up their shame, to the mournful gaze of generations far remote. The dust of martyrs was beneath our feet. We stood on Gallows Hill.” Both the experience of the reader and the two female auditors intermingle as their recognition of the physical location is made apparent.

At the same time, the narrator’s use of the word “our” becomes ambivalent: in one sense it refers to himself and his companions, in another sense it refers to himself and the reader. Moreover, in referring to himself and the reader, he also brings a layer of ambivalence that could also refer to the “real” Hawthorne and the narrative one (Hawthorne as narrator and character in his own text). This shifting of signification blurs the line between speaker/writer and audience/reader, allowing a narrative condensation

that makes the reality of the tale both a more personal and tangible encounter of the text. In yet another sense it refers to his collective ancestry—“guilt and phrenzy consummated the most execrable scene, that *our* history blushes to record. . . . and where *our* fathers set up their shame” (“Alice” 205, emphasis added). The collectivity of Hawthorne’s word choice implies that the fathers and the history apply to him personally, but they also apply to him (both the real person as well as his narrativized representation), his audience, and the reader as part of a national identity.<sup>5</sup>

Yet Hawthorne’s sense of place anchors his narrative. He has “often courted the historic influence of the spot,” and is concerned that others are not as compelled to “obey the summons of the shadowy past” it embodies “as it beckons them to the summit” (“Alice” 206). In addition, he laments a misinterpretation of the place, partly because “we are a people of the present and have no heartfelt interest in the olden time,” but also because the “young men” who scare the town “with bonfires on this haunted height . . . never dream of paying funeral honors to those who died so wrongfully, and without a coffin or a prayer, were buried here.” Hawthorne’s concern seems to venerate the past, but bemoans its misuse. For him, the history of Gallows Hill is too personal to be used as the foundation of a sport, and though he may connect with the place for his fiction, he does so in such a way that remains true to what he feels is the spirit of the past.<sup>6</sup> He echoes this sentiment in “The Custom House” sketch when he defends his fiction of the letter, “What I contend for is the authenticity of the outline” (*Scarlet* 147).

Indeed, Michael Colacurcio explains how “the narrator is not so much substituting a true story for a wild romance as he is merely literalizing psychohistory for an audience which obviously lacks the literary sophistication to discern the historical truth of a

metaphorical fiction—an audience which insists on regarding fantasy as *mere* fantasy” (87). The fantasy Hawthorne tries to dispel seems to be, at least on one level, the fantasy of America as an entelechy, and Salem as a New Eden. His tone seems one less of anger, as Colacurcio describes it, than of frustrated expression slightly echoing the abject. The narrativized Hawthorne seems a muted version of its author, reaching across his fictional audience to his textual one. He literalizes a psychohistory both for himself and his audience, but he also materializes it using Gallows Hill as the physical anchor for it. This process transforms Gallows Hill into a psychotopography—a geographical and psychological heterotopia that serves as the locus in which Hawthorne attempts to negotiate the expression of an alienating identity rooted in a personally conflicting paternally-based national history. His incomplete, though not failed, expression takes the forms of spectral projections upon the real landscape.

Yet in remaining true to the spirit of the place, Hawthorne must still seek neutral narrative ground to express his sense of place, an expression that becomes tied with the wood-wax on top of the hill, choking out the grass that normally would grow there.<sup>7</sup> He observes how all vegetation “has been destroyed by this vile and ineradicable weed: its tufted roots make the soil their own, and permit nothing else to vegetate among them; so that a physical curse may be said to have blasted the spot” (“Alice” 205). Since Hawthorne closely ties this place to “our fathers” and the fact that their sin caused the curse, then the wood-wax comes to embody a source of inexpressible paternal guilt in his shadowed imagination, one that he feels he must share. Yet that guilt, because it is tied to the foundations of American history, must be understood by his audience as well. Though not abject, the historical experience Hawthorne uses to narrate the place echoes

the mechanics of abjection. Gallows Hill in “Alice Doane’s Appeal” functions as a concrete embodiment of Hawthorne’s unconscious repression of a desire to disavow his paternal metaphor. The resulting expression of that landscape remains somewhere between the uncanny and the abject.

Consequently, the author focuses on the only objects “on which time and human toil had produced no change” so that he may throw “in imagination, a veil of deep forest over the land . . . as when the prince of hell bore sway there” (“Alice” 207). Having achieved this connection with the past, which is anchored for the author in the physical location of Gallows Hill, he then sets out to tell a tale “driven by stronger external motives, and a more passionate impulse within.” Almost like a performer, he controls the external physical setting for the imbedded tale as much as he controls the allegorical one. Hawthorne “made [the ladies] sit down on a moss-grown rock, close by the spot where we chose to believe that the death tree stood.” The ambiguous “we” assumes that choosing to believe it also makes it true for the reader: we—the reader, the listeners, and “I”—are beginning to commune with this place. Yet before beginning his story, the author experiences “a little hesitation on my part, caused by the dread of renewing my acquaintance with fantasies that had lost their charm.” It seems, however, the charm of the tale is the experience of hearing it on Gallows Hill, and reconnecting with that locale for Hawthorne is a brief exploration of his repression.

Hawthorne (the narrator) then tells the story of Alice Doane and her brother Leonard Doane, and how Leonard murdered Alice’s lover Walter Brome out of filial jealousy. Confessing to a local wizard, Leonard recounts how he searched “into the breast” of Walter, and found him to be his “counterpart” (209). He further describes how

“There was a resemblance from which I shrank with sickness, and loathing, and horror, as if my own features had come and stared upon me in a solitary place’.” But Walter appears more as the mirror image of Leonard, a true “counterpart.” While Leonard was educated in “rude wilderness,” Walter was educated “in the cities of the old world.” Leonard led a life of “gentle and holy nature” while Walter’s was a “reckless and ungoverned life.” Ultimately, the “withered blossom of every virtue” that exists in Walter Brome “had been made to bear fruit in” Leonard. Upon hearing of the murder, the wizard laughs aloud, a laugh that mingles with a gust of wind. After murdering his rival for his sister’s affections, Leonard feels “as if a chain had fallen from [his soul] and left [him] free,” but he soon discovers that the face of Walter “wore a likeness of my father” and his “soul shrank from the fixed glare of the eyes.” In fact, Leonard imagines himself as “a weeping infant by my father’s hearth; by the cold and blood-stained hearth where he lay dead.”

Hawthorne (the author) then breaks his narration of the tale to describe how he (the narrator) wanted to “throw a ghostly glimmer round the reader, so that his imagination might view the town through a medium that would take off its every day aspect, and make it a proper theatre for so wild a scene as the final one” (“Alice” 212). Yet that medium for his audience, both the two ladies and his reader, is the physical location of Gallows Hill. When he moves back into the narration of the story of Leonard Doane, the levels of narration become uncertain. Hawthorne states:

As they went, they seemed to see the wizard gliding by their sides, or walking dimly on the path before them. But here I paused, and gazed into the faces of my two fair auditors, to judge whether, even on the hill where so many had been brought to death by wilder tales than this, I might venture to proceed. Their bright eyes were fixed on me; their lips apart. I took courage, and led the fated pair to a new made grave, where for a few moments, in the bright and silent midnight, they

stood alone. But suddenly, there was a multitude of people among the graves.  
(212)

In this paragraph all levels of the narration conflate to entangle both the reality and the fantasy of the location in a grand diegetic collapse. That there are two “fair auditors” mirror the two characters in the narrated tale, and that Alice and Leonard Doane view the wizard echoes the ladies watching Hawthorne recount his tale. Thus, by the end of the paragraph the reader is unsure of who the “fated pair” being led to the grave is, and for a brief narrative moment Hawthorne himself becomes the wizard of the tale, which he is narrating. Moreover, the fact that there is suddenly “a multitude of people among the graves” is true in both the tale and the narration of the tale, since earlier Hawthorne tells his reader that “we trod among the tangled weeds, and almost hoped that our feet would sink into the hollow of a witch’s grave” (206).

Hawthorne fixes the tale to the spot, and ties the narration to himself, by revealing “all the incidents were results of the machination of the wizard, who had cunningly devised that Walter Brome should tempt his unknown sister to guilt and shame, and himself perish by the hand of his twin-brother” (“Alice” 214). Indeed, if the wizard and Hawthorne are the same in narrative, then the actions are his creations. Yet Walter resembles Leonard’s father, which makes sense because his last name, “Brome,” is also the name of a particular type of weed-grass, recalling the wood-wax present on the hill. Hawthorne goes on to say that “the wizard’s grave was close beside us, and that the wood-wax had sprouted originally from his unhallowed bones.” The end of Hawthorne’s tale doesn’t work, because the narration is a forced attempt to bring his audience into an awareness of his own repressed desire to disavow his heritage. Hawthorne’s personal story has its historical limits. When the ladies laugh at “a narrative which had good



authority in our ancient superstitions,” the author has no choice but to evoke the real history on which his fantasy was based.

No longer needing to imagine the fantastic setting, Hawthorne notes that “an indistinctness had begun to creep over the mass of buildings and blend them with the intermingled tree tops. . . . Twilight over the landscape was congenial to the obscurity of time” (“Alice” 215). “[Calling] back hoar antiquity,” he then “[strives] to realize and faintly communicate, the deep, unutterable loathing and horror, the indignation, the affrighted wonder, that wrinkled on every brow” as he recalled the hangings on Gallows Hill in 1692. It is only when he traces “their every step, by rock, and shrub, and broken track, till their shadowy visages had circled round the hill-top, where we stood” that Hawthorne feels he must stop short of the “blacker horror” of picturing the scaffold and admits that “the past had done all it could” (216). Hawthorne concludes his tale with the regret that “there is nothing on its barren summit, no relic of old, nor lettered stone of later days, to assist the imagination in appealing to the heart” (216). But his narrative has now just become a part of the hill’s history, and becomes that monument.



Hawthorne’s early tale “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (1832) exemplifies a negotiation of these conflicting desires. When Robin Molineux arrives in the “little metropolis of a New England colony” (“My Kinsman” 69), he embarks on a journey that ultimately leads him to a specific house—“a large square mansion, distinguished from its neighbors by a balcony, which rested on tall pillars, and by an elaborate Gothic window, communicating therewith” (79). Robin goes on to think to himself “‘Perhaps this is the very house I have been seeking’.” His quest is for the dwelling of his “kinsman, Major

Molineux" (70). The house he finds, however, as Robert C. Grayson points out, is Boston's Province House, which acts as the centerpiece of Hawthorne's later "Legends of the Province House" published in 1838 (555). Grayson's analysis illuminates the very real but unnamed geography of Boston that serves as the bedrock upon which Robin's gothic environment is built. He goes on to propose that the probable specific date of Robin's arrival is "midsummer's eve, 23 June 1730" (547).

Having grounded Robin's midsummer nightmare in reality, Hawthorne presents his reader with a tale not about a haunted house, but rather about a ghosted house—a house that haunts in that it never fully appears. Every time Robin asks about his kinsman, he actually, and unfailingly, states that he is seeking the "dwelling" or the "house" of Major Molineux, not the Major himself (Hawthorne, "My Kinsman" 70, 73, 75, 76, 77). Consequently, the anxiety that pervades Robin's "evening of ambiguity" (80) stems from his homelessness and his inability to read clearly the cityscape around him. He quests for a house he never finds, and his very first thoughts in the town disavow any possibility of his fulfilling his quest after he "[scrutinizes] the small and mean wooden buildings": "This low hovel cannot be my kinsman's dwelling, . . . nor yonder old house, where the moonlight enters at the broken casement; and truly I see none hereabouts that might be worthy of him" (69). Robin's words suggest that he has fashioned a patriarchal ideal as a substitute for his father, and then projected that ideal upon a real architectural structure, only to become lost in the resulting discrepancy.

Seeking this totemic object as a way to make real the authority he feels he lacks, Robin ultimately learns that its authority is grounded in nothing but a lack. Hence, his first encounter is with a man who has "authority," but that authority is on its deathbed.

Robin seeks to “overtake” the “man of years” in an area of Boston where the houses have become “more respectable in their appearance” (Hawthorne, “My Kinsman” 69). Yet Robin’s expectations are sadly disappointed, because the old man’s rebuke is interrupted by the “two sepulchral hems . . . like the thought of the cold grave obtruding among wrathful passions” (70). Moreover, after being rebuked by the gentleman with a phallic “long and polished cane” and “sepulchral hems,” Robin becomes “entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets” finding that “the streets were empty, the shops were closed, and lights were visible only in the second stories of a few dwelling houses” (71). Robin’s disorientation stems from his inability to read the second stories of the city in which he seeks confirming signifiers of authority.

As a result, Robin remains severely out of place, and his ambiguous experience becomes shared with the reader. Consequently, Robin’s dreams on the steps of the (unnamed) Old South Church across from the Province House become something akin to reality for the reader. Hawthorne’s story is one of patriarchal rejection on many levels. Being the youngest son, Robin is inadvertently disinherited because his elder brother “was destined to succeed to the farm, which his father cultivated” (Hawthorne, “My Kinsman” 81). Though not overtly expressed, Robin’s sense of rejection manifests itself in the dream as he sits on the steps of the Old South Church and dreams of his father’s household. He sees “them go in at the door; and when Robin would have entered also, the latch tinkled into its place, and he was excluded from his home” (80). As a prodigal son, Robin cannot return to his home, nor does he feel himself welcome there. Perhaps this condition results from his perceiving “the slight inequality of his father’s voice when he came to speak of the Absent One.”

The ambiguity of this sentence seems to serve as both the pretext and the postscript of Robin's experiences. The "inequality" of his father's voice hints at both the respectable and pious humility of a clergyman when referencing the "Absent One," yet the "Absent One" may also refer to Robin's absence, therefore highlighting Robin's slight contempt for his father. Moreover, the capitalization of the term "Absent One" hints at its reference to a heavenly "Father." Yet if that is the case, the title counteracts the assumption, since God is assumed to be omni-present rather than absent. Additionally, Robin has this dream as he sits on the steps of the Old South Church, a totemic manifestation of absent authority, given that his father is a minister. Indeed, Robin sees only "deserted pews" and "quiet aisles" within the church, so much so that "The scene made Robin's heart shiver with a sensation of loneliness, stronger than he had ever felt in the remotest depths of his native woods" (Hawthorne, "My Kinsman" 79). Feeling both excluded from his home and yet dolorous for having left it, Robin responds to his dream by "starting" the words "Am I here, or there?"

But physically, psychologically, and metaphorically, he is in neither place. He is liminally situated such that his real location becomes his Real (in the Lacanian sense) location. Accordingly, the cityscape of Boston and its central location in the tale, the Province House and the steps of the Old South Church, begin to function as a form of the Lacanian *objet petit a*. As Dylan Evans observes of this crucial element of Lacan's algebraicization of the desirous subject, "an object which cannot be symbolized in the same way as all other objects. . . . the object-cause of desire, and anxiety appears when something appears in the place of this object" (12). Robin, having loosened his ties to the paternal metaphor, embarks on an anxiety-ridden evening of ambiguity in search for a

new anchor.<sup>8</sup> Yet his kinsman, the Major, cannot fulfill that void, and as a result the environment that envelops Robin assumes the representative traits of the *objet petit a*. But since this substitute signifier of the unattainable and the unrepresentable object-cause has no anchor itself—that is it floats between the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real—Robin must move from house to house as he moves through Boston. Consequently, the city becomes an anxiety-ridden ambiguous maze, the center of which Robin can never locate. This fact causes him to become lost between the two houses—the Old South Church and the Province House. One is vacant and lonely, and one is only “*perhaps . . . the very house*” he has been seeking (Hawthorne, “My Kinsman” 79, emphasis added).

This experience at the boundary of representation infects Robin’s psychological and physical encounters with his surroundings. When he first sits on the steps of the Church, he “endeavored to define the forms of distant objects, starting away with almost ghostly indistinctness, just as his eye appeared to grasp them” (Hawthorne, “My Kinsman” 79). Hawthorne describes Robin’s experience of Boston as if only the immediate physical surroundings of his protagonist exist while the rest slowly dissolves into “ghostly indistinctness.” What marks this act of Robin’s looking is that it constructs his Boston as he moves inside it, but in turn it also highlights his feeling of the Lacanian gaze, which, as Philippe Van Haute makes clear of Lacan’s conception, “condemns the subject to an irremediable indeterminacy, and the subject is as it were ‘dispersed’ throughout the signifiers from which its existence takes its form, without being able to find its definitive determination in any one of them” (135–136). Robin’s encounter with physical Boston reflects the anxiety of his inability to resignify his lack, and so it closes

in upon him, forcing him to continually stray lest the nothingness of its vanishing borders sweep him away.

While on the steps of the Old South Church, “he could have sworn that a visage, one which he seemed to remember, yet could not absolutely name as his kinsman’s, was looking towards him from the Gothic window” of the Province House (Hawthorne, “My Kinsman” 81). Feeling the gaze from the window, Robin senses the full force of his ambiguous state. Moreover, that he cannot “absolutely name” that gaze as “his kinsman’s,” indicates his inability to re-anchor his identity in the signifiers of a new paternal metaphor. He only “seemed to remember” the “visage,” indicating that though familiar, the object gazing back at him lacks all context or dependence upon other signifiers, since he cannot be sure if he can “re-member” the visage at all. Indeed, the word “visage,” although commonly used for “face,” actually refers to the appearance of the face, not the face itself, and thus the object gazing at him does defy apprehension while highlighting Robin’s own sense of lack of identity reference.

Written almost two decades before *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), “My Kinsman Major Molineux” reflects the early anxieties Hawthorne felt about the material history—specifically Salem—that surrounded him, as well as his relationship to that history and the history of his nation. That Hawthorne intended “Kinsman,” along with “Alice Doane’s Appeal,” to be part of his intended but unpublished collection, *Seven Tales of My Native Land*, hints that Hawthorne was concerned with writing the history of himself through the history of his place. That these tales were then reintended by 1829 for a collection titled *Provincial Tales* discloses even more, because “provincial” connotes geographic location, American colonial (or post-

colonial) identity, and a certain amount of narcissism in perspective.<sup>9</sup> The material manifestations of history such as Salem, Gallows Hill, the Province House, the scarlet letter, and the Custom House act like the surface of a distorted Lacanian mirror from which the Real presence of history haunts the subject and resists and undermines its signification as a symbolic ideal.

The roots of expressing this ambivalent relation to history emerge in “My Kinsman,” a tale written before Poe began publishing his gothic explorations of the same subject. Hawthorne continues to return to this topic, and one can glimpse his personal connection to Robin in “The Custom-House”:

Soon likewise, my old native town will loom upon me through the haze of memory, a mist brooding over and around it; as if it were no portion of the real earth, but an overgrown village in cloudland, with only imaginary inhabitants to people its wooden houses, and walk its homely lanes, and the unpicturesque prolixity of its main street. Henceforth, it ceases to be a reality of my life. I am a citizen of somewhere else. (Hawthorne, *Scarlet* 157)

Like Robin’s experience of Boston, Hawthorne’s relationship to Salem creates a different sense of physical place—one that becomes part and parcel of the counter-expression of what Lauren Berlant terms “National Symbolic”—“the order of discursive practices whose reign within a national space produces, and also refers to, the ‘law’ in which the accident of birth within a geographic/political boundary transforms individuals into subjects of a collectively-held history” (20). Hawthorne is engulfed by the national fantasy of a collectively-held history not only through the accident of birth, but also through the accident of genealogy. He attempts to write what Foucault would term a “counter memory” for his experience with the place of Salem, one which causes it to exist only in the author’s direct presence. Thus, Hawthorne’s Salem becomes one that looms out of a mist and retreats back into it again.

Robin's interaction with the cityscape of Boston is an incomplete expression of this angst, or rather, it is the drawn out experience of this angst with an ambiguous resolution. The Province House and the Old South Church do not fully materialize Hawthorne's vacillating relationship with his personal Puritan past and that of his nation, but they do echo his attempts to express the haunting aspect of his internal conflict. As Lauren Berlant observes of "Alice Doane's Appeal," Hawthorne learned that "if one aims to install a subject properly within a discursive field, it is not enough to represent an allegorical context that makes no explicit bridge to the reader reading the narrative. The reader needs to pass through the landscape itself" (51). Yet, Hawthorne obscures that landscape as his reader passes through it, just as the cityscape of Boston slowly loses any distinct reference for Robin. Even the potential anchor of the unnamed Province House becomes subject to effects of anamorphosis: "by turns, the pillars of the balcony lengthened into the tall, bare stems of pine, dwindled down to human figures, settled again in their true shape and size, and then commenced a new succession of changes" (Hawthorne, "My Kinsman" 80–81).<sup>10</sup>

This lack of a distinct concrete form throws into flux the whole signification of the house itself, and emphasizes the anxiety Robin undergoes as he seeks to resituate himself in a new authoritative geography differing from that belonging to his father. Lacan explains this anxiety in discussing the gaze:

From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure. Furthermore, of all the objects in which the subject may recognize his dependence in the register of desire, the gaze is specified as unapprehensible. (Lacan, "Anamorphosis" 83)



Just as Boston disappears into a ghostly indistinctness, so does Robin begin to realize his own elided identity in the face of his attempt to reassert it through the material presence of the architecture of Boston.

That realization is one long drawn out moment of hesitation and uncertainty. Todorov points out how the use of “perhaps” to begin a statement “indicated the speaker’s uncertainty as to the truth of the sentence he utters” (38). That “perhaps” highlights the fantastic element in the narrative when Robin looks at the Province House. The returned gaze contributes to the uncanny effect of the encounter, and ultimately the Real presence of the object slowly undermines the Symbolic function of it. One should remember that Hawthorne chooses objects that have significant historical value in 1832 but significantly less in 1730, due to the intervening passage of history and the American Revolution. As a result, the reader feels the weight of the historical gaze that Robin may not, but which Hawthorne is trying to express indirectly, in the structure of an anxious perception of the paternal gaze. The resulting confusion and hesitation form an indecisive anti-typology of the moment rather than a teleological typology of American history.<sup>11</sup> That is, Robin feels the weight of history without its historical context, and as a result the reader feels this literary moment as the pressure of an incipient past. Both situations remain unstable, uncanny, and threateningly close to abjection, because both situations exhaust the limits of signification at that particular moment. Neither the Old South Church nor the Province House, nor even Boston holds enough historical significance at that moment in the narrative to warrant having a name. Perhaps this fact is also the reason why neither Robin nor his narrative ever formally adopts his “kinsman’s” name. He is, simply, Robin.

Moreover, this effect accounts for the temporal ambiguity of the tale, as well as its conflicting typology. The historical William Molineux (1716–1774) would only have been a young man himself, younger than Robin even, in June of 1730. Roy Harvey Pearce notes that he was an anti-loyalist himself (327), and so his narrative expulsion from Boston would hardly have been a celebration of the Revolution, nor would it have been a foreshadowing type of American democracy. Despite this conflict, the reader cannot help but slip temporally between 1832, 1776, and 1730. When Robin asks the kindly gentleman whether or not the riot he hears around the corner could be made by just one man, the gentleman responds with the question, “May not one man have several voices, Robin, as well as two complexions?” (Hawthorne, “My Kinsman” 83). Robin can only respond with, “*Perhaps* a man may; but heaven forbid that a woman should!” (emphasis added). Robin, seeking some form of signification as an anchor for his identity, finds only the ambivalence of signification, and slowly comes to work within its confines.

Perhaps that ambivalence caused Hawthorne to add the “w” (double-you) to his own name—he employs the grapheme as one attempt to express his anxieties over his conflicting identity narratives, incorporating it into the very signifier he used for himself. Hawthorne does not leave his reader adrift as Poe does, however. The kindly gentleman who befriends Robin calls him by name, despite Robin’s not telling it to him. After the mob rushes Major Molineux past Robin, his kinsman becomes only the “spectre of his kinsman” (Hawthorne, “My Kinsman” 85), and the Province House becomes inhabited by the image of the gentleman “with authority,” but who still retains the “sepulchral hems” in his expression. In fact, his “convulsive merriment” expresses itself on the

balcony of the Province House “like a funny inscription on a tombstone” (86). As Robin digests all of this commotion, he still feels that the “cloud spirits peeped” down upon him. As a result, “the leader gave the sign, and the procession resumed its march.” Indeed, the leader does give Robin a sign, and he is able to resignify himself to himself by the end of the tale, which is why he begins “to grow weary of town life” and move from the city (87). He no longer needs the cityscape to provide a foundation for his identity now that he has resituated authority in the specter of authority. And in essence, as Freud argues in *Totem and Taboo*, “The dead father had become stronger than the living one had been” (178). Robin may move on, but the reader still reels from his experience. Hence, Hawthorne’s short story derives its gothic nature from the expression of a moment of counter-memory that undermines signification.

Hawthorne would explore this anti-typology further in his later collection “Legends of the Province House,” removing his personal experiences and attempting to express a more national anxiety over its lack of history. Over a decade later, he would return to Salem and face his own personal anxieties one final time in *The House of the Seven Gables*.

#### Notes

1. Hawthorne’s remark seems to be a more subtle and less threatening, as well as more personally connected, form of Pierre Glendinning’s observation about the hard and jolting cobblestone streets of New York City: “the buried hearts of some dead citizens have perhaps come to the surface” (Melville, *Pierre* 230).
2. Scarry continues to note that “To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*. . . . It is also possible, however, for the felt attributes of pain to be lifted into the visible world but now attached to a *referent other than the human body*. That is, the felt-characteristics of pain . . . can be appropriated away from the body and presented as the attributes of something else” (13). Scarry terms this process “analogical substantiation” (14).

3. Lacan defines metaphor as the substitution of one word for another so that a new signified is formed. “Metaphor’s creative spark does not spring forth from the juxtaposition of two images, that is, of two equally actualized signifiers. It flashes between two signifiers, one of which has replaced the other by taking the other’s place in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present by virtue of its (metonymic) connection to the rest of the chain” (Lacan, “Instance” 148). Moreover, Lacan observes that “metaphor is situated at the precise point at which meaning is produced in nonmeaning—that is, at the passage which, as Freud discovered, when crossed in the opposite direction, gives rise to the word that is ‘the word’ [*le mot*] par excellence in French, the word that has no other patronage there than the signifier *esprit*—and at which it becomes palpable that, in deriding the signifier, man defies his very destiny” (150).
  
4. Michael J. Colacurcio argues that Hawthorne uses “a narrative persona (who cannot be taken as a mere author surrogate)” (92). Colacurcio simply means to caution the reader against conflating the narrator and the author, but the comment opens up the potential that though the author and narrator are not the same, they are not separate either. The logical middle ground, given that the narrator is himself a self-conscious author who recites a version of a tale that Hawthorne penned earlier, is that the narrator is a narrativization of the author. This possibility highlights how Hawthorne was not only able to project narrative history onto a physical location, but also how bound up he was with that history. He projects himself into the history he projects onto the locale as one incomplete attempt to express the conflict he experienced with his national historical narrative.
  
5. Frederick Crews notes in *Sins of the Fathers* that “Hawthorne’s depiction of an injustice in which his own great-great-grandfather was implicated is full of anxiety and disgust. . . . Whether or not the narrator is a created character, he always gets seized by the combined fear and contempt that Hawthorne customarily shows toward Puritan tyrants—especially ancestral ones” (46–47).
  
6. One should note the dual implication of the word “spirit” when used in connection with place or the past. It conveys both the general mood or idea of a time or place (such as in the German phrase “zeitgeist,” or perhaps in this case “ortgeist,” which would have an anchor). The import of intangibility, however, also lends itself to the more uncanny and gothic aspects of the word as well—spirit as in undead, haunt, or ghost.
  
7. Wood-wax is a weed originally native to Europe and Asia, and adventitious in America. Its being out of place and yet somehow at home on Gallows Hill seems to echo the Puritan paternal presence in Hawthorne’s imagination.
  
8. Dylan Evans simplifies the definition of the Lacanian concept of the paternal metaphor in *An Introductory Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. It involves “the substitution of one signifier (the Name-of-the-Father) for another (the desire of the mother). . . . The paternal metaphor thus designates the metaphorical (i.e. substitutive) character of the OEDIPUS COMPLEX itself. It is the fundamental metaphor on which all signification

depends” (137). A foreclosure of the paternal metaphor removes the possibility of anchored signification, resulting in psychosis and slippage in signification.

9. The implications of “provincial” include the connotation of being self-centered, narrow-minded, or narrow in perspective.

10. Anamorphosis, in art, is the distortion of an image or object that requires a device or spatial location in order to view the image properly. Lacan uses this concept in order to clarify his theory of *the gaze*, the concept “makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated—annihilated in the form that is, strictly speaking, the imaged embodiment of the *minus-phi* [ $(-\phi)$ ] of castration, which for us, centres the whole organization of the desires through the framework of the fundamental drives” (“Anamorphosis” 88–89).

11. Grayson explains this typology by quoting Michael Davitt Bell: “American Historians in the earlier nineteenth century were seeking types. . . . of the triumph of ‘liberty.’ Each instance of the struggle between liberty and tyranny, each emergence of the embryonic democracy, could be regarded as a type of the great culminating example of the victory of liberty over tyranny—the American Revolution” (Bell 8; qtd. in Grayson 552).

CHAPTER 5  
REPOSSESING HISTORY: HAWTHORNE'S HOUSES  
AND GENTLEMAN'S GOTHIC

Hawthorne would return to the Province House in 1838 with the publication of his “Legends of the Province House” in the *Democratic Review*. This time the nameless narrator of the tale seems more like the self-reflective narrator of “Alice Doane’s Appeal,” but he wanders the streets of Boston much like Robin. In fact, one might consider the legends to be a continuation of Robin’s adventure, picking up where the last tale left off—not chronologically, but experientially. The framing of the stories picks up with the nameless narrator standing on Washington Street (what would have been in Robin’s day Marlborough Street), where “a few steps transported me from the busy heart of modern Boston, into a small and secluded court-yard” (Hawthorne, “Howe’s” 626). Moving from “modern Boston” into the courtyard hints at his potential movement through history, echoing how in “Alice Doane’s Appeal” Hawthorne “often courted the historic influence of” historic Salem (“Alice” 206). Thus, it seems Hawthorne’s narrator literally stands in the “court-yard” while he begins to court the history of the house itself. The challenge of engaging history, for Hawthorne, required him to chart the temporal postcolonial territory between colonial aristocratic pride and American democratic ideals.

Hawthorne establishes a certain diegetic geography by suggesting, “a gilded Indian was discernable, with his bow bent and his arrow on the string, as if aiming at the weathercock on the spire of the Old South Church. This figure has kept this attitude for seventy years or more, ever since good Deacon Drowne, a cunning carver of wood, first

stationed him on his long sentinel's watch over the city" (Hawthorne, "Howe's" 626). The legends build upon the landscape of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832) and prefigure "Drowne's Wooden Image" (1844). In retrospect, it seems as if the "Legends of the Province House" acts as one step in the construction of a psychotopographic world in which Hawthorne narrativizes himself as a character, moving from one historical moment to the next, but not in sequential order. For example, in Hawthorne's Boston, the experiences of Hester Prynne take place in the same streets through which Robin wanders, and eventually the narrator of the "Legends of the Province House" wanders to the same spot, gazing upon a gilded Indian that Deacon Shem Drowne carved sometime around the same time he brings his famous "wooden image" to life and parades her around Boston. The same Drowne also carved the weathercock atop the spire of the Old South Church. Halfway to Providence, in Milford, Reverend Hooper mysteriously begins wearing his black veil. At the same time, in nearby Salem, The Pyncheon House of Seven Gables lives out its curse while Hawthorne himself works in the Custom House, walking the very streets Young Goodman Brown trod on the night of his mystical wooded encounter nearly two hundred years before, all while the town pump observes and recounts what it sees.

When pieced together through a somewhat accidental intertextuality, Hawthorne's crepuscular geography appears anchored in Salem and extends outward from it. This structure makes sense considering that his national anxieties become expressed through Boston while his personal anxieties remain in Salem. The bulk of Hawthorne's short stories that contribute to his American New England historical mythology were written or published between 1832 and 1838.<sup>1</sup> Hester Prynne appears in Endicott's Salem; Endicott

vanquishes the festivities at Merry-Mount, then drinks from the Salem “town pump.” Hawthorne attempts to reinscribe an ambivalent postcolonial past in his geography, but ends up creating an ambivalent geography in the process. As a result, Hawthorne’s tales become much like Irving’s *History of New York*. In trying to pen the aborted *Seven Tales of My Native Land* (which was inspired by Irving’s *Sketch Book*), Hawthorne instead presents his native psychotopography in nine tales and two novels. He wanders through the history of his nation like Robin, searching for some representative typology in particular moments, but instead finds only a random collection of disparate significations he cannot read cohesively.

Michael Davitt Bell argues that “if the past contained contradictions, Hawthorne was primarily interested not in resolving those contradictions, but in comprehending their historical relationship” (109). Yet, given his personal connection to the Puritans, it seems that Hawthorne simply cannot resolve those conflicts, and the resulting contradiction must have frustrated Hawthorne’s sense of personal history. If, as Bell points out, the nation was searching for an historical typology to express a logical unfolding of the American national narrative (8), Hawthorne’s efforts to read both his national history and his personal ancestry find expression in the construction of New England as a heterotopic space that could express fully the contradiction with which he wrestled. For example, Hawthorne’s descriptions of John Endicott, the “severest Puritan of all who laid the rock-foundation of New England,” present him as a cruel, unforgiving, intolerant destroyer of the potential Eden that New England could become (Hawthorne, “May-Pole” 370). Yet he appears as a liberator in “Endicott and the Red Cross”: “We look back through the mist of ages, and recognize . . . the first omen of that deliverance which our fathers



consummated, after the bones of the stern Puritan had lain more than a century in the dust” (“Endicott” 548). Despite his ambivalent adulation of Endicott, Hawthorne still must attack the authority of that typology. The “Wanton Gospeller” questions Endicott’s authority as a premonition of autonomy by shouting his rebuttal, ““Call you this liberty of conscience?”” (547). This voice intrudes on Endicott’s speech as the sepulchral hems intrude on the elder gentleman’s authority in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux.” Moreover, the voice hints that the actions of Hawthorne’s ancestors have not left the author’s conscience free at all.

Consequently, the manner in which Hawthorne narrates his tales makes him appear almost as if he has no control over the events in the text. Neither “Endicott and the Red Cross” or “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” is gothic, but since their locations exist “through the mist of ages” they take on the same geographical properties as Robin’s Boston. Hawthorne notes in “Endicott” that “by a singular good fortune for our sketch” there are people being punished in the stocks (543). He states in a footnote in “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” that “Did Governor Endicott speak less positively, we should suspect a mistake here. . . . We rather doubt [Rev. Blackstone’s] identity with the priest of Merry Mount” (367). These slightly subversive comments indicate that the readers, along with the narrator, are wandering travelers who are watching the singular events unfold—events which Hawthorne, despite his “author-ity,” cannot control. Hawthorne presents these events as historical singularities that, when grouped together, create an anxiety-ridden emerging history of an adolescent nation rather than a homogenous teleology of a nation’s destiny. The events themselves have a narrative, but like the Province House, the scarlet letter, or the giant’s tombstone on the seashore, the events are

found objects of sorts. Hawthorne writes them in such a way that the reader stumbles upon the events and watches them unfold. They loom out of the “mist of ages,” with only a half-context, so that the reader must take the events as they are. Consequently, they are tales of an impending past, not the past, and as such they persist partially in the present.

Hawthorne also depicts the Boston Province House in this way. The structure emerges from the “busy heart of Modern Boston,” situated in the “small and secluded court-yard” (Hawthorne, “Howe’s” 626). The house itself becomes something of a metaphor for American national history, because “any jar or motion was apt to shake down the dust of ages out of the ceiling of one chamber upon the floor of that beneath it” (628). The physical manifestation of history—the dust—cannot remain stable, and the chambers of the house, “which were probably spacious in former times, are now cut up by partitions and subdivided into little nooks” (627). Like the rooms of the Province House, the once grand narrative of British colonial history in America has now become a series of isolated events that, though separate, combine to make up a fractious narrative of a post-colonial nation. Hawthorne literally re-cognizes the past. When Hawthorne has his reader sitting looking at the Province House with Robin, the house gazes back. With the “Legends of the Province House,” Hawthorne moves his reader inside that structure, revealing a somewhat even more anxiety-ridden foundation of national identity by using the real structure of the Province house as a focal point for the heterotopia of a perceived national identity. In such a heterotopia the past becomes tangibly present, and in that state the tangible present also slides into the psychotopography of the incipient past.

The “oceanic” feeling Freud discusses in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “a feeling of indissoluble connection, of belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole” becomes complicated when manifest in material experience (1–2). Freud points out that “If we try to represent historical sequence in spatial terms, it can only be done by juxtaposition in space; the same space will not hold two contents” (6). This idea persists when a material object becomes encoded with history. Freud’s metaphorical spatial observation of the mind reveals some limits to materiality, but it also highlights the psychological potential of a heterotopic space. If, as Foucault states, a heterotopia “makes the place I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (“Of Other” 24), then the heterotopic presence of the Province House and the uncanny effect that follows it become a perfect mechanism with which Hawthorne can begin to express his paradoxical sense of national identity.

In the fourth tale of the “Legends of the Province House,” the narrator hints that Old Esther Dudley keeps company with “a tall, antique mirror, which was well worthy of a tale by itself” whose “surface was so blurred, that the old woman’s figure . . . looked indistinct and ghostlike” (“Old Esther” 671). Moreover, the mirror provides the company for Esther because “it was the general belief that Esther could cause . . . all the figures that ever swept across the broad plate of glass in former times . . . to re-appear, and people the inner world of the mirror with the shadows of old life.” This image of the mirror’s ability to summon ghosts from the past as well as transform individuals from the present into ghosts allows for a complex reading of the material object and the manner in

which it becomes encoded with history. First, the specular image of the mirror acts as a recording device or camera that somehow records the portraits of those who have passed in front of it, so that they remain recorded in the object itself. Second, the image of the mirror suggests that one sees history embedded in the object, yet that history is only one's reflection—that is, the historical encounter comes from one's self and not the object. Therefore, this experience is the expression of an estranged subjectivity.

Esther also sends forth “a black slave of Governor Shirley's from the blurred mirror” to “[knock] at the iron doors of tombs, or upon the marble slabs that covered them” so that she may “[mingle] with them as if she were likewise a shade” (“Old Esther” 672). This mirror becomes like the house itself, existing as a manifestation of the split between the signification and the Lacanian Real. The paradoxical space of the mirror reflects the “unapprehensible” gaze “in which the subject may recognize his dependence in the register of desire” (Lacan, “Anamorphosis” 83). The “over there” of the mirror mimics the “over there” of historical narrative made physically present not only in the gaze suggested by the mirror, but also in the persistent materiality of it. It is an “antique,” with a “tarnished” and “heavily wrought” frame (Hawthorne, “Old Esther” 672). This effect, as Lacan suggests, causes the subject “to symbolize his own vanishing and punctiform bar in the illusion of the consciousness of seeing oneself see oneself, in which the gaze is elided” (“Anamorphosis” 83). Indeed, when Esther invites children into the Province House, as Hawthorne does with his reader and narrator, the children emerge from the house “bewildered, full of old feelings that graver people had long ago forgotten, rubbing their eyes at the world around them as if they had gone astray into ancient times, and become children of the past” (Hawthorne, “Old Esther” 672). The

presence of the past affects the children as much as it does Robin and his encounter with Boston.

The mirror imagery also makes Hawthorne's conception somewhat problematic, since the mirror offers a finite space in which the multiple "shadows of old life" can appear. At the same time, unlike a portrait, the mirror wipes its surface clean for the next reflection, making it, in a sense, an immanent and immediate portraiture of the present while maintaining the narratives of the past. Benedict Anderson has pointed out how material objects manifest the conflict inherent in the convergence of the present and the past (204). To negotiate this conflict, one seeks a coherent narrative of "identity."

Thus, a material object serves a mimetic function and lays the foundation of a metaphoric experience of history, even with one's own self. Similarly the mirror, the Province House, the House of the Seven Gables, or any historical object embodies a direct physical connection to the past brought into the immediate present. Such a direct link to the past, as opposed to the mimetic representation, creates a more immediate psychological experience of the past in the person who encounters it. That encounter initiates a second narrative of the object, however, one that centers on the subject's perception of the object but which is not validated by legal proprietary right. The original narrative retains its "claim" on the object. Hence, the mirror remains, in a sense, the perfect medium with which to keep a certain amount of control over history, because it allows signification for both historical significance and immanent portraiture.<sup>2</sup>

Negotiating this historical conflict, one reflected in the material object, seems to be the primary function of Hawthorne's historical romances, specifically the ones set in historically real places, such as Boston's Province House. Though not specular, that

history, as Hawthorne's narrator in "Legends of the Province House" suggests, is speculative in its expression. In describing his first encounter with the Province House, he observes the "iron balustrade" in which "These letters and figures—16 P.S. 79—are wrought into the iron work of the balcony, and *probably* express the date of the edifice, with the initials of its founder's name" ("Howe's" 626, emphasis added).<sup>3</sup> The use of the word "probably" highlights the dual nature of the historical significance of the balustrade. That the initials and the year intermix and break apart the date creates a temporal ambiguity about its physical historical presence that one must read and interpret in the present. Moreover, the ambiguous nature of the signifier itself allows the narrator's ambivalent word choice the potential to create multiple historical meanings for the date and initials. Thus, the narrator's encounter with physical history becomes one that, according to Tzvetan Todorov, is an experience of the fantastic. It allows both the present and the past to occupy the single space of the material object.

Todorov observes that both "imperfect tense and modalization" in narratives "indicates the speaker's uncertainty as to the truth of the sentence he utters" (38). Hence, as I mentioned in Chapter Four of this study, the use of the word "perhaps" keeps the reader "in both worlds at once." In the historical encounter, however, the choice is not between the uncanny and the marvelous (as Todorov's structure argues), but rather between two temporal modes of consciousness—past and present—which become embodied in the historical material object and encoded with issues of authority. The historical experience for the narrator becomes one that he can access since it becomes mediated through his subjectivity. He even admits to the reader at one point that "this derivation [of the legend], together with the lapse of time, must have afforded

opportunities for many variations of the narrative; so that, despairing of literal and absolute truth, I have not scrupled to make such further changes as seemed conducive to the reader's profit and delight" (Hawthorne, "Howe's" 629). As a result, the narrative becomes both more democratic in nature and more anchored in a history he himself feels he can access. By reclaiming the narrative, the narrator actually "profits" from it; he has gained both access and authority in a history that previously had excluded him through proprietary legal and colonial signification.

Though one might argue against classifying the emergent American nation as postcolonial, there is no doubt that citizens such as Irving, Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe, felt some typically postcolonial effects in the readjustment of the American identity. This self-perception—this new identity that anxiously sought narration—grew from a double consciousness stemming from both its Puritan roots and its perceived European fatherland. As a consequence, Hawthorne's narrator's retelling resembles what Homi Bhabha terms "mimicry": "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. . . . [It] emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. . . . [becoming] transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" ("Of Mimicry" 86). Applied to narrative, this observation shows the "Legends of the Province House" to become exactly that—a "double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (88). Indeed, almost every encounter that the narrator has with the material space of the Province House includes language that hints at ambivalent imaginative history: "It was in this apartment, *I presume,*" "*for aught I know,* the lady of Pownall . . . *may* have sate [sic] beside this

fireplace,” and “From this station, *as I pleased myself with imagining*, Gage *may* have beheld his disastrous victory on Bunker Hill” (“Howe’s” 626–628, emphasis added).

What strikes the reader of the “Legends of the Province House” is that the narrator’s imaginings and the physical link to historical reality become just as intermingled as the initials and the founding date on the balustrade. For example, the narrator states that he “was forced to draw strenuously upon [his] imagination, in order to find aught that that was interesting in a house which, without its historic associations would have seemed merely such a tavern” (“Howe’s” 627). Yet, he then goes on to observe, “Up these stairs the military boots, or perchance the gouty shoes of many a governor have trodden” (628). The adverb “perchance” seems to apply to the steps of the “gouty shoes” but not to the “military boots,” and therefore brings half of the speculative image into the realm of perceived historical reality rather than speculation. The presence of the stairs reinforces this ambiguity, since *someone* must have walked up them in the past, and it is probable that a general or governor at one point did so, even if the narrator must “draw strenuously upon [his] imagination” to prove it.

This speculative nature of Hawthorne’s history functions in multiple capacities. It links the material object with its past, thereby manifesting the presence of the past. At the same time, it allows the subject who experiences the physical encounter with the object to lay a claim to the history that surrounds that object. The overall result of these two effects establishes a displacement of the past while maintaining its significance, or perhaps even embracing its significance. It becomes “a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry” 89). In other words, it allows Hawthorne to negotiate the temporal postcolonial territory between



colonial aristocratic pride and American democratic sociability. The Revolutionary War legends of the Province House illustrate this element. Julian Smith suggests that the tale “forces us to a melancholy realization that the alternative to aristocratic splendor is often Proletarian shabbiness” in its narrative frame (33). Yet, the narrative frame allows for the reclamation of the former glory of the Province House while allowing the narrator a form of democratic access to it. The very choice of the Province House as the object of the “Legends” underscores this fact. Hawthorne chooses a real, historical house for his romance-legends. It is not the House of Usher, nor is it Monk Hall. Fay Campbell Keynor notes that “of the nearly eight hundred dwellings in the port of Boston at the time [1716], it was the choicest” (6).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the Province House is a well-known historical fixture, the history of which, paradoxically, no citizen of Boston could fully know. Built as a privately owned private home (1679), the house then became a publicly owned private home (1716–1776), only to become a privately leased public house (1835). The progression of ownership makes one consider Hawthorne’s choice of houses for his “Legends.” As a privately owned private home, the Province House signifies the height of aristocratic inaccessibility while still remaining outwardly visible to the public.<sup>5</sup> As a publicly owned private home of the Massachusetts colonial governors, access was still restricted to the “king’s successive representatives” but its interior would host “royal receptions and the aristocracy’s receptions and balls” (Keynor 6). As a privately leased public house (a tavern), the Province House had made the full transition to open democratic access—its significance and uses had been completely transformed. Though it had not moved, its address changed from Marlborough Street to Washington Street, similar to the way in which Rip

Van Winkle's favorite tavern transformed King George III into George Washington. In fact, Hawthorne's narrator mentions he was "walking along Washington street" in the first sentence of the first tale (626), perhaps as a clue to his impending unconscious narrative revisioning.

The "Legends" mimic this form of ownership in literary experience. A legend "leases" the real material place (be it Sleepy Hollow or the Province House) and commingles its material truth with fiction in order to reappropriate access to the object without falling into "Proletarian shabbiness." One can drink in the tavern of the Old Province House alongside the ghosts of governors, while being among the company of the crowd. Roland Barthes suggests that "Semiotically, the 'concrete detail' is constituted by the direct collusion of a referent and a signifier; the signified is expelled from the sign, and with it, of course, the possibility of developing a form of the signified, i.e., narrative structure itself" ("Reality" 147).<sup>6</sup> In other words, the narrator hollows out the primary narrative associated with the house, displacing it so that it can never maintain a unity that sustains authoritative signification. By turning history into legend, or rather, amalgamating history with legend, Hawthorne turns narrative into an historical "Third Space of Enunciation" (Bhabha, "Commitment" 37). That space—providing narratives for material objects that already signify, essentially re-membering the past—"constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha, "Commitment" 37).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the narrator's encounter with the Province House in Hawthorne's tale becomes more personalized, more fractious, and yet somewhat more democratic.<sup>8</sup> The narrator can then

gain some partial authority as he encounters the history of the house. The physical structure of the Province House supports this encounter since the “white oak frame-work” of the house resembles “an antique skeleton,” while the brick walls allow for one to “gut the whole, and build a new house within the ancient frame and brick-work” (“Howe’s” 628). Hawthorne’s “Legends” initiate that building. Such a reading begins to challenge spatial signification as well, since the “second story” of the house exists within the walls of the Province House rather than on top of it.

For Emily Miller Budick, “Historical consciousness respects the integrity of a world outside the self, a universe separate from the individual’s power to perceive and narrate the dimensions of reality” (218). That such thinking “enables the individual to render moral judgments” assumes a certain amount of authority on the history’s part. In fact, Budick describes history in a manner similar to the Lacanian recognition of the “Other,” and perhaps it is in this respect that some form of historical consciousness serves an anchoring function of identity. Thus, her insight that “Hawthorne’s point is that we never stand outside reality; we never stand outside history” highlights the perceptual subjectivity from which Hawthorne creates his narratives (231). Hawthorne seems to be doing more than just moralizing on what happened. By incorporating legend into real physical objects that anyone may encounter, as well as penning tales about those objects that anyone may read, he seems to be establishing a haunted literary territory for an emergent postcolonial nation. Budick’s argument that “romance history begins by accepting the historical past, crediting its separate and tangible existence” (231) seems only half-correct, since it is the tangibility of the past that makes it both at once separate from and part of the subject. Hawthorne allows his readers, by way of walking with his

narrator, imaginatively (and potentially literally) to step into history. The material tangibility of the Province House allows the narrator—and Hawthorne himself—to become a part of that history through the subjective experience of it.

The individual legends themselves reflect this aspect of Hawthorne's narrative style. If, as Budick argues, historical consciousness anchors the subject in such a fashion as to enable the recognition of "a universe separate from the individual's power to perceive and narrate the dimensions of reality," and "Hawthorne's point is that we never stand outside reality; we never stand outside history," then the expression of this point would require the narrative compression of time. Hawthorne pushes his narration so that in existing in the incipient past, his geography reflects a brush with borders of the Lacanian Real. The uncanny result expresses the anxieties of both insufficiency and anticipation.

For example, in the first legend of the Province House, "Howe's Masquerade," the most uncanny moment occurs when Sir William Howe confronts his assumed counterpart in the funereal procession:

The figure, without blenching a hair's-breadth from the sword which was pointed at his breast, made a solemn pause and lowered the cape of the cloak from about his face, yet not sufficiently for the spectators to catch a glimpse of it. But Sir William Howe had evidently seen enough. The sternness of his countenance gave place to a look of wild amazement, if not horror, while he recoiled several steps from the figure and let fall his sword upon the floor. The martial shape again drew the cloak about his features and passed on; but reaching the threshold, with his back towards the spectators, he was seen to stamp his foot and shake his clenched hands in the air. (Hawthorne, "Howe's" 637–638)

Howe's "horror" stems from a specific source—the procession of royal authority, from Endicott through Bellingham through Belcher up to Major General Thomas Gage, moves from the past to the present. Lord Percy, a guest at the masquerade, remarks that one of the members of the procession is "the shape of Gage, as true as in the looking glass"

(636). The moment Howe confronts his assumed own image, he occupies in the logic of the procession a temporal tautological space. That confrontation exists on the border of the past and the present—in the incipient past—just before the shadow of Howe moves into predicting the future with the stamp of his foot: “It was afterwards affirmed that Sir William Howe had repeated that self-same gesture of rage and sorrow, when, for the last time, and as the last royal governor, he passed through the portal of the Province-House.”

The horror and amazement Howe expresses stem from his own subjectivity in perceiving himself as part of the doomed history of royal authority. Though the reader may experience a thrill of the ghost story, the moment, though uncanny, does not threaten the reader directly. Rather, the overall effect of that instant conveys an anxiety over the past, even while it seemingly reinforces the nationalistic narrative. That effect would not be possible without Hawthorne’s creating a spectral environment for that moment. As he describes the masquerade, he recasts the Province House almost as a crossroads of history, since it “thronged with figures that seemed to have stepped from the dark canvass of historic portraits, or to have flitted forth from the magic pages of romance, or at least to have flown hither from one of the London theatres, without a change of garments” (Hawthorne, “Howe’s” 629). The somewhat transgressive setting of the tale allows the first figure of the procession to appear without revealing his origins. The narrator states that “A figure now presented itself, but among the many fantastic masks . . . , none could tell precisely from whence it came” (632). Moreover, these figures “crossed the threshold and vanished through the portal” (633). Hawthorne’s word choice suggests the supernatural as the source for the procession, while still grounding it in the possibility of reality. Like Brom Bones with his Headless Horseman, Colonel Joliffe and his

granddaughter seemed to have “possessed some secret intelligence in regard to the mysterious pageant” (638). Still, the counterpart of Sir William Howe appeared to the spectators as if it were “suddenly moulding itself amid the gloom” (637).

The fantastical element of the narration of the text leaves the reader much like the narrator of the legends. Though it may be that it “is desperately hard work, when we attempt to throw the spell of hoar antiquity over localities with which the living world, and the day that is passing over us, have aught to do,” the narrator still feels a “thrill of awe” as he regards the staircase and the door of the Province House (Hawthorne, “Howe’s” 629). That “thrill of awe” expresses a closer connection to the unfolding history of a new nation, but it would not be possible without the narrator’s experiencing the material presence of the Province House. In addition, the experience remains haunting without being too threatening because the reader, like the narrator and the other guests at Howe’s masquerade, never fully sees Howe’s spectral counterpart, and cannot confirm it. Instead, like an image in the looking glass, the tale remains only a reflection of the subject’s encounter with the incipient past. The reader sees Howe see himself in the procession of history, and therefore is only carefully nudged to contemplate his own position as he encounters the material surroundings of the Province House. Howe views a narrativization of himself, and finds the experience more threatening than the reader. Thus, the narrator describes the portal of the house as the spot “whence their figures preceded me” (639).

This sense of reading the material past stays with the narrator in the second legend, “Edward Randolph’s Portrait.” As he walks down the street, the narrator’s fancy is “busy with a comparison between the present aspect of the street, and that which it probably

wore when the British Governors inhabited the mansion” (Hawthorne, “Edward” 640). The Province House presence initiates a form of historical consciousness that at once initiates the temporal distance and the conscious proximity of the subject to the past. Indeed, even the Old South Church acts as an anchor of sorts, since it “still pointed its antique spire into the darkness, and was lost between earth and heaven.” Thus, the narrator’s historical consciousness acknowledges history almost as a separate place, but one that still exists for him to experience. If, as Freud noted, the same space will not hold two contents, then the narrator is in the process of understanding that which occupied the same space before him. As the “black, lowering sky” and the “wintry blast” remain the same, so do Old South Church and the Province House, yet they somehow remain “lost between earth and heaven” as they connect the past and the present.

Equally important, the narrator’s musings indicate his longing for a sense of experiencing that history as new, or rather inceptive. He notes how in the past “buildings stood insulated and independent, not, as now, merging their separate existences into connected ranges, with a front of tiresome identity,— but each possessing features of its own, as if the owner’s individual taste had shaped it” (Hawthorne, “Edward” 640). Given Robin’s architectural musings in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” one can see how the narrator’s longing for more “insulated and independent” buildings express a desire to throw off a “front of tiresome identity.” In Lacanian terms that is impossible, since even those buildings had some connection to signification in the colonial context, anchored in a more monarchical paternal metaphor, the crown. Still, the narrator seeks a connection with the past in somehow trying to re-envision his own identity as a citizen of perhaps another time by stepping into an embodiment of that past.

Of course, the narrative of “Edward Randolph’s Portrait” reflects this consciousness, since a “black, mysterious picture”—despite its missing physical presence—still has an effect upon the reader. The narrator makes a point of saying that the picture “used to hang in one of the chambers of the Province House, directly above the room where we were now sitting” (Hawthorne, “Edward” 641). Hawthorne imparts elements of a ghost story to the narrative, since the picture is not present for the narrator to see in 1838, but is present for the legendary events of seventy years prior. If a house can be haunted, then so can a portrait. If a person can haunt, then so can a person’s visage. Consequently, the structure of the tale works in two ways. First, the narration filters the tale so that it does not threaten the reader while it haunts the subjects of the tale. Second, it provides a ghosted object, one that is lost, but one that in the legend is “found” and in need of narration. Thus, even the legend contains legends about the portrait. According to Captain Lincoln, it is a portrait of the devil, it is haunted by a demon who only shows himself at times of public calamity, its “visage” stares at servants from beyond the blackness, and it haunted those who looked upon it (643). Hawthorne truly describes the object when Captain Lincoln states that the “dark old square of canvass [sic] . . . has been an heir-loom in the Province-House from time immemorial.” Indeed it is an heir-loom that looms over its heirs.

That Alice Vane speaks to the object as if it were actually a demon adds to the overall ghostly character of the tale, but once again the reader watches the interaction of the characters from the safety of a narrative filter. So, though the Lieutenant-Governor’s voice “had a tone of horror” (Hawthorne, “Edward” 648), that horror remains buffered by the narrator’s presence. Yet the narrator becomes slightly caught up in the fantasy of the



moment, and feels the presence of the past in the rooms above him: “it seemed as if all the governors and great men were running riot above stairs” (651). In fact, the eerie effect causes the narrator to think about the physical house itself:

In the course of generations, when many people have lived and died in an ancient house, the whistling of the wind through its crannies, and the creaking of its beams and rafters, become strangely like the tones of the human voice, or thundering laughter, or heavy footsteps treading the deserted chambers.

Though the reader remains safe from the threatening effect of the tale, the narrator does not. He begins to realize that like the portrait, the Province House itself is an heir-loom that impends upon the present moment. Passed down through generations, the house forces him to become aware of his subjectivity in relation to history. In noticing that “it is as if the echoes of half a century were revived,” he sees himself as a potential echo, having a fleeting glimpse of himself as now being, however small, a part of the narrative of the house. In that brief moment, the narrator romanticizes his brush with the Lacanian real. The sounds still “reared and murmured” in his ears as he “[plunges] down the doorsteps” as if he is trying to outrun the immanence of the moment.

The legend of the portrait states that the “eyes” of the portrait “had a peculiar glare, which was almost life-like” (Hawthorne, “Edward” 649). This glare persists in the shadow of the portrait, since it no longer hangs in the house yet still remains a material possibility “hidden in some out-of-the-way corner of the New England Museum” (651). He even suggests that “perchance some curious antiquary may light upon it there, and, . . . supply a not unnecessary proof of the authenticity of the facts here set down.” The double negative, “not unnecessary proof,” suggests that proof is secondary to the shadow of the object. As long as the Province House exists, the narrator and the reader both can

feel the gaze of the portrait if they wish, because the house itself acts as a subjective conduit for the past.

Hawthorne later reworks these elements as he explores his personal relationship with Salem and its history in the *House of the Seven Gables* (1851). The presence of Colonel Pyncheon's portrait, the parade of Pyncheon ancestors approaching that portrait, even the embedded legend of Alice Pyncheon, all combine with physical presence of the house itself to provoke a gothic resonance.

In his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne contrasts the Novel to the Romance by first laying out his intention to “claim a certain latitude” and expressing “fairly a right to present that truth [of the human heart] under circumstances . . . of the writer's own choosing or creation” (351). The first paragraph echoes with a tone of justification and assertion of right (perhaps even to “claim” the “latitude” of the property itself).<sup>9</sup> The rest of the preface allows latitude for the reader to do as he wishes with the narrative, using such rhetorical turns as “the Reader, according to his pleasure, may either disregard or allow it to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events” (351), and the “Reader may perhaps choose to assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of the narrative” (352). Equating his “Romance” with “Legend,” Hawthorne uses such ambivalent language that the narrative seems left to the reader to construct, while Hawthorne still maintains a sense of authorship, however modest. Though he is not “permitted by the historical connection” to avoid the “actual locality,” Hawthorne claims that the “personages of the Tale,” and indeed the house itself, “are *really* of the Author's own making, or at all events, of his own *mixing*” (352–353, emphasis added). The subtle correction of “making”—which implies no reality—to “mixing” undermines the

disclaimer of the preface that he is “laying out a street that infringes upon nobody’s property rights, and appropriating a lot of land which had no visible owner, and building a house, of materials long in use of constructing castles in the air” (353). All of these elements indicate *pure* imagination, not mixed.

But this mixture allows for a heavily gothic atmosphere to “to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events” (Hawthorne, *House* 351). Hawthorne uses this mixture as the dry ice to create the “legendary mist” that envelops his romance and allows the legend to “prolong itself.” Despite the author’s intentions, the narrative does not remain content “to connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us.” Rather than making a fantastic setting seem real, he makes an actual physical locality and object appear to have elements of the fantastic by “bringing his fancy-pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment” (352). As a result, he superimposes one upon the other, forcing characters like Clifford to come face to face with “the phantasmagoria of figures” in Maule’s Well, just as Old Esther Dudley recalls the ghosts from the mirror (484). Indeed, Maule’s Well (which still retains the name of the “original occupant of the soil”) remains to infect the presence of the land (356).

Considering that both Pyncheon-street, which “formerly bore the humbler appellation of Maule’s Lane,” and the Pyncheon-elm have taken the name of the man whose deed continues to haunt the property, the water in Maule’s Well, “as it continued to be called,” seems to be a source of disruption to the contiguity of the Pyncheon narrative. Its water “grew hard and brackish. Even such we find it now; and any old woman of the neighborhood will certify, that it is productive of intestinal mischief to

those who quench their thirst there” (Hawthorne, *House* 359). Thus a physical object manifests the subversive nature of the legend. That its potency for agitation comes from an old wives’ tale accentuates the resistant power of narrative. Indeed, the “mischief” the water from Maule’s Well causes is “intestinal”—that is, it works from within. The gastronomic metaphor has come full circle from the preface’s mingling of “the Marvelous” as a “slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the Public” (351). Considering that in his preface Hawthorne suggests that crimes of a previous generation will become “pure and uncontrollable mischief” (352), his reader understands that his attachment to the House of the Seven Gables is both personal and literary.

Another form of internal mischief appears in the character of Holgrave. Hepzibah Pyncheon briefly discusses him in Chapter Five, “May and November,” except she “hardly knew what to make of him” (Hawthorne, *House* 424). He has “the strangest companions imaginable” in his company, including “cross-looking philanthropists.” His company acknowledges “no law,” while he makes speeches “full of wild and disorganizing matter” for his “banditti-like associates.” This description of Holgrave (whose name suggests where the past may be buried) renders him as a living counterpart to the well that bears his ancestor’s name. What Maule’s Well is to the Pyncheon House, Holgrave seems to be to the living Pyncheon family—a presence of postcolonial resistance that seeks to reclaim the house from within. Holgrave’s presence as internal storyteller underscores this fact, since he guards his claim at his ancestor’s well with a legend just before he “vanishes”: “‘Be careful not to drink at Maule’s Well!’ said he.

‘Neither drink nor bathe your face in it! . . . because like an old lady’s cup of tea, it is water bewitched’ (433).

If, as Frederick Crews suggests, the “Pyncheon forebears, whose history opens the plot and is resumed at several points, are unmistakable representatives of the Hathornes” because of the “mixture of nostalgia and resentment in their portrayal,” then it seems Hawthorne manifests a certain amount of disruption because of their sins (174). He presents the entire structure of the Romance using fluid narrative borders that never fully set. Hawthorne himself presumably introduces the Romance in the introduction; then he sets up his narrator almost as a fictional version of himself. The narrator seems to be from “our New England towns,” yet only has “occasional visits to the town aforesaid” (Hawthorne, *House* 355). As a result Hawthorne ghosts himself within his fiction, much as he does in the “The Custom House”—but in “The Custom House” he is an insider who is forced out; in *The House of the Seven Gables*, he is an outsider who forces his way back in. He “seldom [fails] to turn down Pyncheon-street, for the sake of passing through the shadow” of the house, which itself “has always affected me like a human countenance” (355). Hawthorne slowly transitions his real self into a fictional self, just as he slowly transforms the real House of the Seven Gables into the fictional one. In so doing, he sets up the narrative for all kinds of internal transgression, beginning with the diegetic boundaries of the narration itself.

Perhaps when Hepzibah Pyncheon mentions that Holgrave “has such a way of taking hold of one’s mind,” she is considering the effect of his narration. Holgrave exclaims, “‘Shall we never, never get rid of this Past!’” (Hawthorne, *House* 509). Despite its apparent lamentable tone, the construction of his statement seems ambiguous.

Though the exclamation mark indicates passion, the statement seems an oddly phrased hope, and as such embodies the desire to do away with the past while somehow preserving it. Though he may believe that “we live in Dead Men’s houses,” Holgrave needs to declaim that history before he can reclaim it (510). Thus he brings up the “the story of Maule” to Phoebe. Holgrave states, “The house . . . is expressive of that odious and abominable Past, with all its bad influences. . . . I dwell in it for awhile, that I may know the better how to hate it.” As a result, Holgrave leaves an effect of the fantastic upon the reader, so that even if he can explain the mysterious blood cough of Colonel and Judge Pyncheon, that explanation does not eliminate the anxiety of the supernatural from the reader’s experience. Hinting at this, Hawthorne has Holgrave explain to Phoebe that the Pyncheon curse should be viewed “not as superstition . . . but as proved by unquestionable facts, and as exemplifying theory” (511). Holgrave, just like Hawthorne, turns history into legend and legend into history, even reclaiming Phoebe from the Pyncheon family—he tells her that he “cannot think of [her] as one of them.”

“As one method of throwing it off,” Holgrave tells Phoebe, “I put an incident of the Pyncheon-family history . . . into the form of a legend” (Hawthorne, *House* 512). Just as Hawthorne hollows out the Puritan past of Salem and New England in order to inscribe himself in it by writing his romances about the House of the Seven Gables and its surrounding geography, so does Holgrave inscribe himself into the fictional house with the story of Alice Pyncheon. This internal narrative, intended to throw off the “hold” the house and its past have on Holgrave’s mind, focuses on the grandson Matthew Maule gaining access to the house by way of controlling Alice’s mind. Of “foreign education,” Alice comes to represent the “aristocratic pretensions” of the Pyncheon

family, at least to the wizard's grandson (517, 525). As a result, Alice embodies a colonizing power, one that occupies a place that Maule rightfully should hold. Therefore, when Maule mesmerizes Alice, he gains a form of ownership over her by hollowing out her will: "She is mine! . . . Mine, by right of the strongest spirit" (529). When the elder Pyncheon attempts to protest, he "could make only a gurgling murmur in his throat" (531). In fact, Alice herself can only make a "half-uttered exclamation" that is "so indistinct, that there seemed but half a will to shape out the words" (528). The grandson Maule mingles his will with that of Alice, and prevents both her and her father from speaking, corrupting their ability to reclaim their property through narrative declamation.

The battle of wills sits at the heart of Holgrave's story, but the concept of a will suggests both the spirit and the passing on of property. Thus, the "will" of wizard Maule seems to reclaim the Pyncheon property from the will of the Colonel Pyncheon. That the resulting transaction takes Alice's life may be unfortunate, but it was the Colonel who took Maule's life in order to gain the property. Thus, the property becomes perversely equated with human life, and therefore gaining control of Alice through the infection of the grandson Maule's will reclaims the property. Accordingly, Holgrave's narrator claims, "Her father, as it proved, had martyred his poor child to an inordinate desire for measuring his land by miles, instead of acres" (Hawthorne, *House* 531). Yet, the tale is not triumphant in its tone because it does mourn Alice's death. Though it illustrates in miniature the postcolonial endeavor Holgrave embodies, it also cautions against killing the source of the power. Thus, "in spite of his scorn for creeds and institutions," Holgrave constructs his narratives with a "rare and high quality of reverence for another's

individuality” (534). Holgrave may want to marry Phoebe and thus repossess the House of the Seven Gables, but he does not want to kill her.

This slippage of metaphorical signification allows the property to become a substitute for psychological will. The house itself functions as the object-cause of desire, the *objet petit a*. Its presence acts outside of signification, and hence the will becomes a poor and unattainable substitute. Thus Gervaise Pyncheon and Judge Pyncheon seek the legal title deed, which by the end of the novel is worthless. Matthew Maule seemingly knows its secret location, but only agrees to reveal it in exchange for the house. All signification passes through the house, but the house does not directly sustain it. As a result, Alice Pyncheon becomes a tragic surrogate for the house over which a battle of wills is fought for a deed. Perhaps its status as the unattainable object-cause of desire enables it to gaze back at Clifford with a “dark face” via Maule’s Well (Hawthorne, *House* 484). Indeed, that dark face also then slips into the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon, which conceals the deed that Judge Pyncheon seeks.

Holgrave’s profession as a daguerreotypist parallels this slippage as well, since in taking one’s portrait he fuses his vision with their appearance and transforms them into a piece of property that can become owned. He confides to Phoebe that “While we give it credit only for depicting the merest surface, [the daguerreotype] actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even could he detect it” (Hawthorne, *House* 430). Painting may mingle imagination with the object, but its authority remains visible in the brushstrokes. The daguerreotypist can retain anonymous authority since he “takes” the portrait, but the light directly interacts with the real object. Holgrave takes the picture, but the subject who experiences it supplies the



narrative, the “secret character.” Though Judge Pyncheon may affect certain narrative for himself, “the sun, as you see, tells quite another story, and will not be coaxed out of it” (431). The pun here seems obvious, for the entire novel is about the “son” telling a different story: the grandson Matthew Maule’s narrating a different story for Alice Pyncheon, Holgrave’s narrating a different story for the Pyncheon-house, and Hawthorne’s telling a different story for the House of the Seven Gables (and, indeed, Salem itself).

In fact, the son’s different story seems more conflated than one might think, considering that Hawthorne ghosts himself as the narrator of the novel and then subtly slips into the character of Holgrave himself. When Phoebe asks if Holgrave writes for the magazines, he replies, “among the multitude of my marvelous gifts, I have that of writing stories; and my name has figured . . . on the covers of *Graham and Godey*” (Hawthorne, *House* 512). Hawthorne himself had published in *Graham’s Magazine* and *Godey’s Lady’s Book* by the time *The House of the Seven Gables* was published. Since Hawthorne’s use of the verb “figure” can mean both “to adorn” and “to make a likeness of,” the ambiguity aids in the blending of the narrative levels, contributing the uncertainty of the overall effect of the tale. Holgrave narrates the legend of Alice Pyncheon, which is based on “an incident of Pyncheon family-history.” Yet, the tale itself becomes a form of truth in the fabric of the novel. Its presence becomes such a part of the events that Holgrave exclaims, ““This is the very parchment, the attempt to recover which cost the beautiful Alice Pyncheon her happiness and her life”” (624), and Uncle Venner “fancied that sweet Alice Pyncheon . . . had given one farewell touch of a spirit’s joy upon her

harpichord, as she floated heavenward” (626–627). The legendary becomes real once history has been made into legend.

The superimposition of these narratives releases the romance from the teller’s control. Maria Tatar notes that the novel reveals all at the end, like a detective novel, and begins the “process of disenchantment” (178). Her argument that “By lifting the mystery and bringing the deed to light, Holgrave exorcises the spirits residing in the house” works on the level of structure, but it ignores the reader’s experience. Just as Phoebe becomes enchanted by Holgrave’s narrative, the reader is left lingering in wonder. Though Holgrave has revealed all, that revelation reveals still more questions, and keeps the spirits in the house. For example, the facts that Holgrave is actually a Maule, and ““in this long drama of wrong and retribution, [he] represent[s] the old wizard”” begin to cast doubt on his true intentions. Moreover, Matthew Maule’s death “was a death that blasted with strange horror [his] humble name” and “[obliterated] his place and memory from among men” (Hawthorne, *House* 357). Yet if Matthew Maule is a “martyr” to the Salem witch trials, it would mean that he was never truly a wizard. Despite this assumption, “history, as well as fireside tradition, has preserved his very words” as coming from a wizard (358). In the retelling of the history, Maule transforms from an innocent farmer to the wizard Maule, all the while slowly gaining all the supernatural powers of one. In the narration of the tale, history becomes speculative fact in the reader’s experience.

Hawthorne manipulates this effect well with the reader’s response to the gathering of the Pyncheon ghosts in the old parlor. This narrative turn manifests yet another layer of narrative that fuses the previous narratives together for the reader, so that even if Holgrave may explain the facts to his fellow characters, he cannot explain the presence of

the ghosts to the reader. In fact, the narrator expresses his surprise at seeing the young Jaffrey Pyncheon's ghost among those in the parlor: "Were we to meet this figure at noonday, we should greet him as young Jaffrey Pyncheon, the Judge's only surviving child, who has been spending the last two years in foreign travel. If still in life, how comes his shadow hither?" (592). While still in doubt, the moment appears to be mere speculation or fancy, but at the end of the novel the narrator relates that the same young Jaffrey Pyncheon has died of cholera "just at the point of embarkation for his native land" (621). Thus, the ghostly presence ceases to be a narrative indulgence and becomes an episode of the fantastic, leaving the reader to wonder about the haunted presence of the parlor despite the novel's apparent happy ending.

In a skillful narrative reversal, Hawthorne claims veracity for his tales by dismissing them as legend: "what sense, meaning, or moral, for example, such as even ghost stories should be susceptible of, can be traced in the ridiculous legend, that, at midnight, all the dead Pyncheons are bound to assemble in the parlor!" (Hawthorne, *House* 591). The statement dismisses the tale's importance, while the exclamation point reinforces its passionate intensity. The result forces the reader to prove a negative; the impossible task then weds the fiction to truth, nesting the legend as a ghosted secret truth. The narrator tells his reader "The fantastic scene, just hinted at, must by no means be considered as forming an actual portion of our story" (593). But as Barthes argues, "within a system an absence of an element is itself a signification. This new meaning—extensive to all historical discourse and ultimately defining its pertinence—is reality itself, surreptitiously transformed into a 'shamefaced' signifier" ("Discourse" 139). Once Hawthorne has written the ghost story into the narrative and treated it as reality, he

cannot disavow it or “unnarrate it” without strengthening it further as a part of the narrative reality. Moreover, Hawthorne embeds elements in the ghostly gathering that the narrator cannot resolve.

Indeed, the narrator even notes that “Indulging our fancy in this freak, we have partly lost the power of restraint and guidance” (Hawthorne, *House* 592). Losing control over part of his narrative, the narrator admits that part of the narrative rests in the reader’s mind. All the while Hawthorne remains as author, but seemingly self-effaced. This effect becomes further cemented when the spirits include Alice Pyncheon “who brings no pride, out of her virgin grave,” as well as “the figure of an elderly man, in a leather jerkin and breeches, with a carpenter’s rule sticking out of his side-pocket . . . jeering, mocking. . . .” Alice becomes humbled only in Holgrave’s narrative, and the presence of a Maule seems to represent all of the narrative Maules. Therefore, precisely when the novel becomes most ghostly it also becomes the least controlled by Hawthorne, the narrator, or the reader. All three play a part, but none controls the tale.

This mixture, this partial presence of control, characterizes the romance, and potentially the *gothic* romance, as a democratic genre. Perhaps that is why Brook Thomas notes, “In America, romances are ordinary experiences, and the ordinary is akin to Romance. To write a romance with an American setting is to write a novel” (83). Though it seems too hasty to characterize gothic American romance as essentially democratic, it is reasonable to assume the genre offers the best literary medium with which to negotiate the conflicting feelings of antebellum America’s emerging postcolonial literature. Renouncing the past by allowing access to it, reclaiming territory by inscribing himself into it, and liberating narratives by superimposing them, Hawthorne

seems to have brought to maturity what Washington Irving began with “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.” The ironic potential of this literary force is that it can begin to turn on itself in the postcolonial contest, as authors like Poe and Melville and Lovecraft demonstrate. Nonetheless, Hawthorne’s realistic romances—his *gentleman’s gothic*—remains as an example of antebellum America’s duplicitous postcolonial psychology.

#### Notes

1. “Mrs. Hutchinson” (1830), “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (1832), “Alice Doane’s Appeal” (1835), “Young Goodman Brown” (1835), “A Rill from the Town Pump” (1835), “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836), “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” (1836), “Legends of the Province House” (1838), and “Endicott and the Red Cross” (1838), were all written during this six-year period. In these tales the seeds for both *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) germinated.
2. This idea of history having a certain proprietary nature makes sense given Anderson’s concept of “museumization”—that is, the construction and maintenance of narratives for nations as they form imagined communities (182). When one visits a museum and views George Washington’s chair, that is all one can do. Physical interaction, in most museums, is prohibited. To sit in Washington’s chair carries with it a certain presumptuousness by manifesting a new narrative interaction with the object. The irony here is that in order to maintain an “original” narrative of an object, one must isolate it at a certain distance. The Pilgrims that sit in Shakespeare’s chair in Irving’s “Stratford-on-Avon” incorporate themselves into the history of the chair by remaking the relic into one that is part history and part present, since “the chair had to be new bottomed at least once in three years” (Irving, *Sketch Book* 266)
3. There is also the potential pun of “P.S.” meaning “post-script” as in the ending of a letter, potentially meaning that the Province House is built a second time in the writing of the tales.
4. The Province House was built in 1679 by Peter Sergeant, and was then bought by the provincial government in 1716 to be the mansion of the royal governors. Abandoned in March of 1776, it then became a governmental house at least until 1798, when the State House was completed. In 1811 it was deeded to the Massachusetts General Hospital “as an endowment” (Kaynor 6). It was then leased and between 1835 to 1850 it was run as a tavern, during the 1850s it was an opera house, and from the 1860s to about 1920 it housed “tradesman’s shops” (7). The interior of the Province House was gutted by fire in 1864, and it was finally demolished to make way for a movie theatre in 1922. Nathaniel Hawthorne penned his “Legends” between 1838 and 1839.

5. Though it might seem awkward, it might be useful here to think of the Kennedy Compound or the Playboy Mansion as a modern comparison. Everyone knows where it is, what it represents, but only the select few have access to it—that is, the owner and his guests. Kaynor notes that the Province House was “grander and more elaborate than any other building known in the American colonies” (5). It had a “fifty-one-foot-long façade,” was “conveniently close to the harbor and the markets of Dock Square,” had “a seventy-five-foot-square lawn at its front door, and behind the house tiered gardens and orchards reached westward to Tremont Street” (6).
6. Barthes argues that “in the ideology of our time, obsessive reference to the ‘concrete’ . . . is always brandished like a weapon against meaning. . . . but this same ‘reality’ becomes the essential reference in historical narrative, which is supposed to report ‘what really happened’” (“Reality” 146). This paradox gives rise to the “referential illusion” that forms the foundation for the “reality effect” (148)—that is, the more concrete detail in a narrative, the more “real” it seems simply because of the insignificance of that detail. Hence, “the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism” (148).
7. Bhabha describes this process as part of the “Third Space of Enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition by the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation which Benedict Anderson so perceptively describes being written in homogeneous, serial time” (37).
8. The word “democratic” in this context embodies a concept of self-authority as well as social equality. The tales give the reader access to the Province House, reclaiming it from its colonial history and implications for a democratic audience.
9. Walter Benn Michaels asserts in *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*, “Where the novel may be said to touch the real by expropriating it and so violating someone’s ‘private rights,’ the romance asserts a property right that does not threaten and so should not be threatened by the property rights of others. The romance, to put it another way, is the text of clear and unobstructed title” (89). This observation seems only partially correct, in that by translating it to fiction, Hawthorne stakes a subjective claim to the house. The title, along with other signifiers, to the house becomes meaningless, like the Pyncheon deeds, rather than being free and clear. Hawthorne’s American gothic texts are texts of negotiation, or perhaps renegotiation, of ownership

CHAPTER 6  
BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE:  
ONEIRIC OBLIVION IN THE NEW YORK OF MELVILLE'S *PIERRE*

Undeniably, Herman Melville's *Pierre, or the Ambiguities* (1852) is a gothic text. Yet despite its engulfing oppressive atmosphere, no supernatural events occur in the narrative. Instead, with the setting of Saddle Meadows, Melville throws pastoral gauze over the landscape of (the unnamed) New York State, only to tighten it as he shifts the location of the novel to (the also unnamed) New York City, eventually suffocating all life out of his title character as he writes him into nonexistence. Unlike Irving, who populated his New York landscapes with ghosts, and unlike Poe, who infused his fantastic landscapes with immanent physical threat, Melville conjures an oppressive dread using the psychology of his title character's self-created narrative shadow. In *Constituting Americans*, Priscilla Wald argues that Pierre's alienation, like that of Poe's William Wilson and Hawthorne's Goodman Brown, "is fueled by guilt brought on by the disjunction between what the character does and what the character believes he is supposed to do" (136). This disjunction of *identity* stirs a maelström of *identifications*. Rather than simply being a mirror image, the "choice fate" of Pierre sends him off into a truly ambivalent identity that spirals him into oblivion.

While introducing Pierre to his reader, Melville observes, "It had been his choice fate to have been born and nurtured" in Saddle Meadows, where "the popular names of its finest features appealed to the proudest patriotic and family associations of the historic line of Glendinning" (Melville, *Pierre* 5). In deeds, the "storied heights" (6) of Saddle

Meadows carry a patronymic and patriotic significance for Pierre's identity. As a result, Pierre's "double revolutionary descent" (20) sets him up to be "companied by no surnamed male Glendinning, but the duplicate one reflected to him in the mirror"—a mirror image he views as "capping the fame-column, whose tall shaft had been erected by his noble sires" (8). Along with land, Pierre inherits a prescriptive identity-narrative of revolution that has already been fulfilled in that property. His is a "choice fate," but that choice was not his: Saddle Meadows embodies the deeds of the Glendinning patriarchs—actions that secured the title deeds to the land. Yet, Pierre is left with no ability to cap the fame column of his sires. The column secures his already fulfilled identity, and Saddle Meadows continually reminds Pierre of that which he lacks yet can never attain. But rather than attempt to mend that lack, Pierre renounces it. This structuring of *Pierre* uncannily anticipates concepts formulated by Jaques Lacan and Julia Kristeva. In Lacanian terms, Pierre attempts to abandon evidence of the paternal metaphor and the physical objects that reflect it back to him. His renunciation leads to a regression to the Lacanian Real; the gothic atmosphere of his narrative emerges from a continual slippage of signification that envelopes the experience of both the main character and the reader.

Samuel Otter notes that in Saddle Meadows, "Pierre does not 'possess' the landscape . . . rather, the landscape itself is possessed by the specters of the displaced, made intractable by the weight of their stories," and thus becomes "a pathway for the re-entry of ghosts" (72). The resulting trait of "insistent memory" that the landscape holds also resides in heirlooms of Pierre's everyday life, and is not just a matter of geography. Rather, geography has become encoded with patronymic signification: his grandfather's



vest (Melville, *Pierre* 29), his grandfather's baton (20), his grandfather's bed (270–271), his grandfather's military cloaks (187, 301). When relating how she found Pierre, Isabel quotes the old man who sold her the guitar:

‘old General Glendinning’s place,’ he said; ‘but the old hero’s long dead and gone now; and . . . so is the young General his son . . . but then there is a still younger grandson General left; that family always keep the title and the name a-going; yes, even to the Christian name,—Pierre. Pierre Glendinning was the white haired old General’s name . . . and Pierre Glendinning is his young great-grandson’s name.’  
(153)

Material objects and signifying words have become conflated in their psychological effects—Pierre is determined by the condensation of the name of the father before he can choose to be so. Accordingly, his belated renunciation can only result in his obliteration.

Jaques Lacan’s concept of the paternal metaphor provides a model by which to engage the psychology of Pierre’s circumstances. Seeking such an experience of identity abandonment stems from Pierre’s sense of being bound to a signifying chain of objects that fasten his identity to their system in what Lacan terms the paternal metaphor and its “*point de capiton*,” or “*anchoring point*” (“On a question” 190; “Subversion” 291).

Material objects of Saddle Meadows (including the geographical location of Saddle Meadows itself) function as the “material medium [support]” for the “concrete discourse” of his narratively prescribed identity (Lacan, “Instance” 139). As in Lacan’s model, they operate according to a strict grammatical unfolding that “predetermines [the subject, in this case Pierre,] precisely at the point where he believes he can escape determination by a language he ostensibly controls” (Dor 49).

The paternally encoded material objects that circumscribe Pierre, like words in a language, are anchored to and serve to mark off the context in which they signify his destiny—his place as heir to Saddle Meadows and all it represents. Pierre’s journey to

New York City from Saddle Meadows, then, constitutes a shift in both experiential time and narrative, as well as in metonymic signification. In Melville's narrative, this aspect is manifest in the idea of the city as well as its physical surroundings. If, as Lacan points out, it is at this precise point "at which it becomes palpable that, in deriding the signifier, man defies his very destiny" ("Instance" 150), then Pierre, in effect, seeks to inscribe himself with "oubliers" instead of "souvenirs." Such a move partly accounts for the novel's narrative shift from the sentimental to the Gothic.

Melville's narrator reveals this psychological entrapment between Pierre and his environment when he asks the reader, "How think you it would be with this youthful Pierre, if every day descending to breakfast, he caught sight of an old tattered British banner or two, hanging over an arched window in his hall; and those banners captured by his grandfather, the general, in fair fight?" (*Pierre* 12). Indeed, Pierre's narrative spells itself out for him in the banners, the "Major-General's baton," and the "epaulettes of the Major-General his grandfather" (12–13). That Pierre's mother mentions the epaulettes rather than the actual deeds they represent strengthens this image of Pierre as a fated prisoner to metonymy—that is, to the linguistic mediations of his history. The epaulettes signify not only his patrimony, but also that he too is a simple extension of that paternal metaphor. As such, he cannot inscribe himself into his own narrative, since all that he has is not his own. Moreover, he must somehow become a fulfillment of his patriarchal lineage, but has not the material to do so. Instead, he has only his patriarch's materials.

Freud observes in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that representing history in spatial terms must be done by "juxtaposition in space; the same space will not hold two contents" (6). Yet, when these material objects function as signifying structures, the

diachronic nature of the effect of the anchoring point allows for multiple significations. This element seems to disturb Pierre the most. Therefore, the circumstances are ripe for Pierre to seek to weigh anchor by unfastening the paternal metaphor that binds his sense of self.

Even Saddle Meadows, so named because “the paternal great-grandfather of Pierre, mortally wounded, had sat unhorsed on his saddle in the grass . . . still cheering his men in the fray” (Melville, *Pierre* 6), conflates an ancestral exploit with a material object. The “storied heights” of Saddle Meadows are held not only by the “Glendinning deeds” that bear the “ciphers of three Indian kings,” but also by the historical deeds that secured those lands and are encoded in both the land and the material objects associated with them. In *Pierre*, a narrative necessity encodes a linguistic necessity. Consequently, these actions set in motion what Lacan describes as the “diachronic function of this button tie [anchoring point]” (“Subversion” 292). “The sentence completes its signification only with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction of the others, and inversely, sealing their meaning by its retroactive effect.” The physical space that surrounds Pierre and the objects that fill it both predetermine his narrative and burden him with the obligation of fulfilling it.

Melville reinforces this observation later by musing on the Dutch Manors in northern New York, “whose haughty rent-deeds are held by their thousand farmer tenants, so long as grass grows and water runs; which hints of surprising eternity for a deed, and seems to make the lawyer’s ink unobliterable as the sea” (*Pierre* 11). As a result, when the “present patron or lords will show you the stakes and stones on their estates put there—the stones at least—before Nell Gwynne the Duke-mother was born,”

they exhibit “genealogies, which, like their own river, Hudson, flow somewhat farther and straighter than the Serpentine brooklet in Hyde Park.” These observations establish Pierre—whose name means “stone” in French—to be one of many stones, and perhaps the final one, encoded with the Glendinning family deeds and their patronymic associations. Ultimately he feels compelled to subvert these significations by becoming just an ordinary cobblestone in the pavements of New York.

When Pierre encounters his physical environment of Saddle Meadows, he feels the gaze of history staring back at him. The “one primeval pine tree” that occupies one of the meadows, appears to Pierre to have “half bared roots” of which one is “far out reaching” (Melville, *Pierre* 40). Mark Slouka points out that “the root clearly represents Pierre’s father, the flawed root of the Glendinning family tree” (151). The observation seems appropriate, but at the same time the tree itself embodies the past, since it has “outlived a century of that gay flower’s generations,” and how it “takes powerful hold of this fair earth!” (Melville, *Pierre* 40). Though one root may represent Pierre’s father, it is the *bundle* of roots that allow the tree its powerful hold of the earth—the sum of the structure of his past forms the system of its determinacy. The presence of the past has an immediate impact upon the physical landscape that surrounds and prescribes Pierre’s identity.

When he looks up at the pine tree, Pierre remarks, “as I look up into thy high secrecies, . . . the face, the face, peeps down on me!” (Melville, *Pierre* 41). Pierre feels the gaze not only of his patriarchs, but also of the past and his future place within it. As Lacan remarks of the gaze, “From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with

which the subject confused his own failure” (Lacan, “Anamorphosis” 83). Pierre, in contemplating his place among his historical patrimony, remains haunted by its very physical presence. Like Sleepy Hollow, he has become pre-antiqued. He exclaims, “Thou seemest to know somewhat of me, that I know not of myself. . . . never into the soul of Pierre, stole there before, a muffledness like this! . . . advance I onto a precipice, hold me back” (Melville, *Pierre*, 41). Encountering the physical history of the tree reduces the patronymic narrative of Saddle Meadows so that it thrusts Pierre toward a direct encounter with that history. Moreover, Pierre perceives the face in the whole of the tree, not just any individual root or branch. The tree acts as a physical constant through his history, bridging the historical aporia that exists between Pierre and his patriarchs without allowing him any control over it.

The encounter highlights the need for narrative yet obliterates the possibility of coherence, pushing Pierre to the precipice of the Real. The physical constant of the tree stands as a mute witness to a history that Pierre feels pressured to fulfill yet cannot fully understand because he cannot comprehend his place within it. The homology of Pierre’s crisis and Lacan’s model becomes clearer. Anchored to Pierre’s patriarchs, the tree cannot accommodate Pierre, and marks him thus as alienated from his own narrative. Metonymically, the tree embodies a slippage of signification that connects the object with the name and vice versa.

In fact, Pierre’s exclamations echo those of Poe’s narrator in “The Imp of the Perverse”: “We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy” (270). Poe’s subsequent ruminations about “the perverse” eventually seem to forecast Pierre’s fate: “if we fail in a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves

backward from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed.” Peering into the abyss is to stand upon the edge of the Lacanian Real, and the returning gaze of that Real induces a form of vertigo that undoes patronymic signification. Poe’s Arthur Gordon Pym experiences the same moment as he descends into the chasms on the island of Tsalal, which “bore some little resemblance to alphabetical characters” (225). On Tsalal, the island itself bears an inscrutable signifier which eventually induces in Pym “thoughts of the vast depth yet to be descended” and initiates a “*longing to fall*; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable” until at last he swoons and nearly plunges within the arms of the abyss (228–229). Pym and Pierre feel an abyssal dislocation of identity in the face of inscrutable antecedent signification. For Pierre, New York City embodies that same reversal, but the signifieds for which the city stands have long since been rendered anonymous. Like the Memnon Stone, it signifies the remains of an enigma rather than the enigma itself—further bolstering Pierre’s rush into abjection and initiating the gothic feel of Melville’s narrative.

Pierre encounters this interstitial experience of dread when he interacts with the very physical “Memnon Stone.” That the massive stone, besides its tiny fulcrum, “touched not another object in the wide terraqueous world” and yet it “hovered within an inch of the soil” implies that this object embodies some “truth” that Pierre feels he can “publish” (Melville, *Pierre* 132). In contrast to Pierre’s encounter with the stone, the narrator notes that if “any of the simple people” discovered the stone, their “hoodwinked unappreciativeness” would not “have accounted it any very marvelous sight.” The stone is an inscrutable, yet inscribable, signifier to Pierre that connects him with an “oceanic” experience of place, object, and time. Pierre himself is far from “simple,” given his

history. Indeed, when he discovers the “rudely hammered” initials of “S. y<sup>e</sup> W.” on the rock, he envisions that “long and long ago, in quite another age” the stone was inscribed by “some departed man” whose name he “could not possibly imagine” (133). Hence, Pierre’s sense of history embodies itself in inscrutable objects that act as free-floating signifiers. Therefore, it seems appropriate that Pierre “would like nothing better for a headstone than this same imposing pile” of the Memnon Stone—it is an object to which Pierre can affix his identity.<sup>1</sup> In order to situate himself in his own narrative, he must break free of his anchor and become his own signification. As Lacan describes this effort, “It is by touching, however lightly, on man’s relation to the signifier . . . that one changes the course of his history by modifying the moorings of his being” (“Instance” 165).

Pierre’s experiences are not truly gothic ones so long as the objects around him sustain a metonymic significance. His encounter with the Memnon Stone, when he slides “himself into the horrible interspace” underneath it, brings “speechless thoughts” which give “place at last to things less and less unspeakable” (Melville, *Pierre* 134). Hence, while Pierre has found objects to which he can secure his own narrative—rather than his inherited one—his state does not alienate him, he is not rendered abject by the signifier. There exists for Pierre a temporary state where he approaches re-signification for his name while under the stone. Once Pierre has slid under this figure of his primal signifier, he gives voice to his frustrations. Once he moves out from underneath it, he can only go “his moody way.” It seems that Pierre is not content to be the signified, but rather, he seeks to become pure signifier. He wishes for “Pierre” to become one and the same with “stone.”

To do so, however, is to remain outside of history and to seek a tautological ontology. He attempts to become both the anchor and the fulfillment of himself, thus rejecting the anchor of his patriarchs. In attempting that task, however, he risks self-annihilation. If, as Benedict Anderson notes, all “profound changes in consciousness . . . bring with them characteristic amnesias,” and “out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives” (204), then signification can only occur in the past anchored to a Lacanian “nom du père” (“name of the father”).<sup>2</sup> Pierre must obliterate his family name in order to repossess his own name as his own. That means removing himself from a landscape that manifests a patriarchal presence.

As Pierre Glendinning enters New York City after forsaking Saddle Meadows, Delly Ulver remarks about the hardness of the cobblestone pavements. Pierre reveals his perceptions of the city when he replies, “the buried hearts of some dead citizens have perhaps come to the surface” (230). He strengthens this perception further when he tells Isabel that the city is so still because “brick and mortar have deeper secrets than wood or fell” (231). That is, Pierre thinks of the city as a huge, unitary, metonymic signifier for countless untold narratives—narratives that perhaps can never be fully represented. Accordingly, the cobblestones signify more than the urban setting, they suggest the “buried hearts” of the citizens who once walked on them. In this manner Pierre conceives of the material surroundings of the city as anonymous or vacuous markers of narrative history—signifiers into which he endeavors to anchor and to inscribe his own narrative. Yet his urban experience becomes a haunting one, since his leaving Saddle Meadows removes him from the patrimonial genealogical chain that would anchor his identity in the Symbolic. As a result, Book XVI of *Pierre* acts as a keystone chapter that



illustrates the murky nature of the shift from the domestic sentimental to the urban gothic. In fact, it moves beyond the function of being the simple hinge of a literary diptych in that it captures and depicts the advent of the psychological aporia that produces Pierre's unraveling.

Using that shift, Melville recasts the material geographic location of New York City as a concrete scene of renovated metonymy—an attempt at a psychological restructuring of identity without the oppressive weight of a predetermining paternal metaphor. In that attempt, the narrative arc of *Pierre* restructures that cityscape as locus of a uniquely American nightmare, since once the subject enters the signifying chain one cannot undo that chain without knowledge of what one has lost. It is, in a Lacanian sense, a desperate attempt to situate the subject in relation to the Real, but instead results in what Kristeva terms “Abjection”—“Abjection then wavers between the *fading away* of all meaning and all humanity, . . . and the *ecstasy* of an ego that, having lost its Other and its objects, reaches, at the precise moment of this suicide, the height of harmony with the promised land” (Kristeva 18). Pierre himself becomes caught in this rift of self-annihilation.

Melville's fictional author Plotinus Plinlimmon foreshadows this situation in his pamphlet, which is itself a found object without context: “he who finding himself a chronometrical soul, seeks practically to force that heavenly time upon the earth, in such an attempt he can never succeed, with an absolute and essential success. And as for himself, if he seek to regulate his own daily conduct by it, he will but array all men's earthly time-keepers against him, and thereby work himself woe and death” (*Pierre* 212). Pierre's disconnect from the paternally based metonymic system that determines

his identity initiates a bankrupt crusade to construct himself in relation to a different chain of signification. That vain quest also narrativizes Pierre's experience for both himself and the reader, forcing a dialogic tautology—the reader reads a narrative about Pierre's writing his narrative while he lives that narrative. In the process, the slippage between signifier and signified increases; memory effaces itself in the setting of New York. The unnamed city becomes just another vacuous signifier, and Pierre, “One in a city of hundreds of thousands of human beings” becomes “solitary as at the Pole” (338).

Pierre's assumed paternal half-sister, Isabel, embodies this slippage, and functions as the catalyst for Pierre's self-erasure. Isabel herself represents experience of the abject, and as a consequence her narrative is a gothic one. From the first moment Pierre hears the “unearthly, girlish shriek” it leaves an aporic, “yawning gap” in his heart (Melville, *Pierre* 45). This gap then affects the time of the narration: “his cheek hath changed from blush to pallor; what strange thing does Pierre Glendinning see? . . . The girl sits steadily sewing; neither she nor her two companions speak. . . . she lifts her whole countenance into the radiant candlelight, and for one swift instant, that face of supernaturalness unreservedly meets Pierre's” (46). From the moment Isabel enters the narrative, her presence speeds up time from the past tense, to the present perfect, to the present tense. By the end of the paragraph, the narrative has a hard time keeping up, seeming to force the narrator to guess at what happens next. As a result, Isabel is Pierre's Memnon Stone, his immemorial.<sup>3</sup>

This shift in the tense signals a slight narrative skirting of the Real, as well as a brief encounter with abjection. Isabel cannot speak, both because she does not wish to cause a scene and because the momentary narrative shift from the past to present tense

will not allow for it. There is no anchor in the past for what she could say. She is without a coherent narrative; she is only a collection of moments. Melville even constructs her “story” in two fragments, with undirected side narrations; some parts of it communicated with music rather than linguistic narrative. Her defining trait is that she does not possess the name of Glendinning. Thus, no paternal metaphor secures her history and it is subject to a sliding designification.

She tells Pierre that her “first dim life-thoughts cluster round an old, half-ruinous house in some region, for which I now have no chart to seek it out” (Melville, *Pierre* 114). Because she has no point of reference from which to measure her own sense of identity, the rest of her memories also have none. Her sense of geography, for example, becomes lost. Moreover, “No name; no scrawled or written thing; no book, was in the house; no one memorial speaking of its former occupants. It was dumb as death” (115). Isabel’s perceptions, unlike those of Pierre, are not grounded in metonymic expression—her life has been lived “with no trace then to me of . . . past history.” The one thing that affords her a means of expression, her guitar, remains linked metonymically linked to Pierre’s father only by hearsay and circumstance, which convey either an “unfathomableness of fullness” or the “shallow and unmeaning emptiness” of a surmise (153). Moreover, Isabel insists the guitar belonged to her mother, though it supposedly came from the Glendinning household. That she expresses part of her narrative via music from the guitar, and at times even refers to herself as Bell, intimates that Isabel remains within a system of signification outside the one anchored by her father’s name, especially since the guitar is a presence of her mother more than her father, with “no slightest proof” even supporting that connection (149). Similarly, her self-given surname, Banford, has

no narrative behind it; it appears in the conversation as she speaks of herself as “her who is called Isabel Banford” (154).

The character of Isabel, as a figure of an alternative anchoring metaphor for Pierre, has its roots in Melville’s personal narrative. After the death of Melville’s father in 1832, Alan Melvill’s brother, Thomas, penned a letter that described two women who called at Melville’s grandfather’s house seeking payment for Alan Melvill’s alleged illegitimate daughter (Delbanco 187). Andrew Delbanco contends “There is a slender threat from which to hang a claim about a shameful [Melvill] family secret, but whether or not Melville actually had (or thought he had) a half sister, he certainly brought to the writing of *Pierre* a volatile mixture of defensiveness and anger toward his father” (188). Melville, like Poe before him and Lovecraft after him, was raised with expectations of gentility only to find that the circumstances of his father—including bankruptcy in 1830 and his delirious death in 1832—had foreclosed any of those hopes. That an illegitimate daughter would appear certainly would have helped to discolor the young Melville’s view of his father. Indeed, Melville’s mother, Maria, added an “e” to the family name sometime between 1832 and 1834 in order to distance the family from the father’s past (25).<sup>4</sup> Melville’s own history involved the break from a patronymic signifier, a fact which indicates how all of these factors come to fruition as Melville rehearses this patricidal narrative on the level of an imagined personal history.

Because Isabel is a physical presence that does not support signification, her narrative becomes a gothic one. It resists representation—as she puts it, “All my ideas are in uncertainty and confusion here” (Melville, *Pierre* 116). Yet, as Tzvetan Todorov has argued, “The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one

answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre” (25). The crucial relevance to *Pierre* of Todorov’s view of the fantastic is that it sets down an either/or choice—either the experience is a deception of the senses or it is a physical reality. But the reality of the physical depends upon some system of signification by which its persistence can be secured. Since for Isabel, the paternal metaphor never fully attaches, she continually experiences a schizophrenic uncertainty in which, as Phillippe Van Haute states of Lacan’s theories, “language is powerless to create a distance from reality” (230).<sup>5</sup>

The uncertainty is a reality of abjection rather than one of psychosis, perhaps accounting for why her history reads very much like an Edgar Allan Poe tale. She cannot account for her location, nor does she have any specific name. She remembers “chattering in two different childish languages,” though “what words or language [her guardians] used to each other, this it is impossible to recall” (Melville, *Pierre* 115). Her memories are related in an episodic, staccato manner, with the intervals being “wholly memoryless” (117). The language she can no longer speak was “pure children’s language,” and in her experiences “the solidest things melt into dreams, and dreams into solidities.” Isabel is not predetermined by a paternal metaphor manifest in material objects that anticipate her meaning and determine her identity. She approaches abjection from the opposite side, functioning almost as a psychological mirror image of Pierre as they both step toward the looking glass that makes the crisis of the Real.

Isabel is not a schizophrenic who has experienced a foreclosure of the paternal metaphor—she is, after all, a fictional imagining of a particular crisis rather than a clinical construct. The homology of Lacan’s and Kristeva’s theories to Melville’s

imaginings allows one to say that the metaphor has not fully anchored her sense of identity. Melville constructs her so that her notions of the significance of the word are ambivalent at best: “I did not then join in my mind with the word father, all those peculiar associations which the term ordinarily inspires in children. . . . I did not ask the name of my father” (*Pierre* 145). Only when she has her sole physical object, the handkerchief with “a small line of fine faded yellowish writing in the middle of it,” does Isabel seek to comprehend her father’s name. “At that time I could not read either print or writing. . . . I now resolved to learn my letters, . . . in order that of myself I might learn the meaning of those faded characters” (146).

The word those characters compose, “Glendinning,” is the signifier Pierre seeks to reinscribe without the patronymic prescriptions that go along with it. Myra Jehlen observes that “The founding fathers . . . might be seen as patricidal patriarchs . . . revolutionaries who thus actually ‘killed’ their fathers and made the culminating progressive revolution. In so doing, they ensured but also co-opted the progress of their sons” (194). Like the anchoring paternal metaphor, the actions of Pierre’s patriarchs project forward along a diachronic register, engulfing any chance of Pierre’s escaping their influence on him. In Isabel, Pierre has an opportunity to remake the Glendinning name in his own image, while also rejecting its paternal signification and the prohibitions embodied therein.

A physical object, Anderson argues, “records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, identity . . . which, because it can not be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated” (204). Pierre’s identity, then, is bound up in the objects of the physical inheritance that

surround him. Yet, that identity is neither his identity nor his narrative, and so he seeks to divorce himself from those objects. As Mark Slouka terms it, “Pierre declares war on the past. His every move, however, is reflexive; his every attempt at self-revision, another step toward self-erasure” (148). That “self-erasure” comes from trying to correct what he views as a tainted signification in the paternal metaphor that threatens to consume him. By acting against that metaphor, he attacks history, and shifts the imagined patricidal narrative to include a national history refracted in the individual.

Thus the title of Book XI, “He Crosses the Rubicon” carries both irreversibility and militancy. Yet, Pierre’s first encounter with Isabel initiates that process of moving from memory to forgetting, since she embodies an aphasic memory.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, only when Pierre first encounters Isabel does the narrative begin to take on typical gothic traits—elements that do not solidify themselves in the novel until Pierre moves to the city and experiences firsthand an erasure of identity. The moment before he meets Isabel, Melville describes Pierre’s emotions: “imagination utterly failed him here; the reality was too real for him” (*Pierre* 111). Pierre begins to move from being son and heir to protector and brother, because Isabel represents a signifier that he can encode with his own narrative, one that may have a base in Isabel’s aphasic history, but nevertheless one that he can attempt to complete with his own narration.

During the onset of this entrance into an experience of the Real as he approaches to meet Isabel for the first time—the sliding out from under the original signifiers encoded into his inheritance—“the thicker shadows begin to fall; the place is lost to him” (Melville, *Pierre* 111). Again the tense shifts from the past to the present in the narration to indicate that Isabel allows Pierre to escape his inherited identity narrative. The past

becomes obliterated, or so aphasic that the inherited objects lose their prescriptive ability: “in that one instant, [Pierre] sees in the imploring face, not only the nameless touchingness of that of the sewing-girl, but also the subtler expression of his then youthful father, strangely translated, and intermarryingly blended with some before unknown, foreign feminineness” (112). That same instant, when “In one breath, Memory and Prophecy, and Intuition” mix to speak anew, also is the start of the gothic elements of the narration. Melville keeps the uncertainty of significance in this statement—both the words themselves and the abstract concepts they signify meld into a multiplicity of experience (as opposed to meaning) that acts as an agent to guide Pierre.

Pierre experiences similar moments during his first night in the city. As he approaches the city, the tense shifts from the past to the present, beginning with the phrase “And now . . . the inmates of the coach, by numerous hard, *painful* joltings, and ponderous, dragging trundlings, are suddenly made sensible of some great change in the character of the road” (229, emphasis added). The shift in tense makes the experience imminent, throwing the “inmates” of the carriage from their contexts and into the present moment. Indeed, the change in the road is not represented but rather felt physically with “painful joltings” Highlighting the fundamental atavism of Pierre’s experience, such pain becomes a felt form of anti-narration, since Elaine Scarry suggests that “physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). As he moves closer to the Real, Pierre’s experiences become less communicable and more felt—words dissolve into isolated experiences. “Whatever pain achieves,” Scarry argues, “it achieves in part through its unsharability,



and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language” (4). Given this observation, Pierre’s alienation and physical pain serve as a symptom of his psychological dislocation with regard to the Real, where language becomes unanchored and hence loses its ability to communicate in an ordered fashion.

As Scarry contends, “physical pain—unlike any other state of consciousness—has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language” (5).<sup>7</sup> At the moment he enters the city on that cobblestone road, Pierre literally becomes caught between a rock and a hard place. His regression to the Real by renouncing the paternal metaphor, binding himself to Isabel, and removing himself to New York City compels him to doomed narrativization. His experiences are those of isolation because there is no other foundation available for his identity—no alternative signifying chain to which he can reattach. In that shift, Pierre has sentenced himself to an unconsummated novel yet compelled himself to the task of writing it.

In *Constituting Americans* Priscilla Wald notes, “Paternity seems to be something Pierre believes he can deny, but, typically, he confuses representation with materiality” (144). In his situation, however, materiality *is* representation. In fact, that materiality summons up the “cultural specters, dissociated ideas and values that haunt as they circumscribe the beleaguered author” (132). Yet, underneath such haunting lies Pierre’s understanding of his material surroundings. Wald describes Pierre’s experience as one that stems from an “unacknowledged (internalized) script” that is both self-made and “reproduced in accordance with cultural demons,” but he takes his cues from the external metonymic objects and the deeds—imagined or real—that they signify.

Hence, the title character's external environment both reflects and refracts his derailed identity. Throughout this process Pierre struggles to give that identity a voice of anonymity, a struggle that illuminates for the reader the foundations of his experiences in New York. Melville tells the reader "Pierre's was a double revolutionary descent" (*Pierre* 20). Such a genealogy has a quadruple significance, however. His great-grandfather fought in the French and Indian War, both of Pierre's grandfathers fought in the American Revolution, his father fought in the War of 1812, and now Pierre himself seems scripted to rebel in some manner as well. But a "double revolution," in another sense, negates itself, and in so doing leaves Pierre without an established identity, or rather, obliterates it. Pierre's binding himself to Isabel's abjection so suddenly begins to fall into place as one part of Melville's narrativizing of Pierre's angst.

One cannot be obliterated and self-conscious at once, and as a result Pierre becomes significantly suspended, a stray in every sense of the term, situated in abjection. Kristeva argues this point in *Powers of Horror*:

The abject from which [the deject] does not cease separating is for him, in short, a *land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered. . . . We may call it a border; Abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. (8–9)

To be obliterated, to unfasten the paternal metaphor, is to become abject, and yet, Pierre discovers that obliteration is not a choice one can make for oneself. In many ways, then the "choice fate" of Pierre is exactly that—a contradictory paradox of meaning where free will results in abjection. Moreover, Pierre finds that one cannot make the choice to live in abjection. Isabel is arguably abject in her youth, but she finds expression in music because she has something akin to a paternal metaphor once Pierre "marries" her. The city dwellers do not feel abjection, because they have learned to read their surroundings,

perhaps to deal with imminent existence. But, as Wyn Kelley notes, “Pierre has this knowledge forced upon him; he is the first of Melville’s characters to discover that he has constructed a labyrinth of his own” (146).

Indeed, Pierre realizes the full impact of his actions as he “turned out of the narrow, and dark, and death-like bye-street” only to find himself “suddenly precipitated into the not-yet-repressed noise and contention” of New York City at night (Melville, *Pierre* 236). Pierre becomes part of a multiplicity, in which he is out of the contextual metonymic chain—he becomes a free-floating signifier. The cab driver who brings them into the city even states of Pierre, “He don’t know where he wants to go to, cause he haint got no place at all to go to” (234). His encounters have no context at first—but as Pierre experiences the city he struggles to set them into one.

His brush with what seems to be a prostitute has no context, it simply begins with the quote, “I say, my pretty one! Dear! Dear! young man! . . .” (Melville, *Pierre* 237). As Pierre and the reader encounter these words, the speaker and its context are unknown. They simply intrude upon the narration. Yet the imminent moment eventually gives way to narration:

Pierre turned; and in the flashing, sinister, evil cross-lights his eye caught the person of a wonderfully beautifully-featured girl; scarlet-cheeked and, glaringly-arrayed, and of a figure all natural grace but unnatural vivacity. Her whole form, however, was horribly lit by the green and yellow rays from the druggist’s. (237)

For Pierre the moment is imminent, but for the reader the moment must be narrated. Thus, the struggle to put the experience of amalgamated signifiers that signify nothing except ambiguity becomes a “flashing, sinister, evil” encounter. Mixing the erotic and the repellent, beautiful and horrible, the girl does not signify, she simply is. The narrator, Pierre, and the reader all try to narrate that existence contextually, but all fail in the

attempt. Pierre's attempt at narration becomes just as ambiguous: "'My God!' shuddered Pierre, . . . 'the town's first welcome to youth!'" Yet, Pierre's shudder seems both horrific and narcissistically orgasmic; the reader is left with little to no idea what that welcome is.<sup>8</sup>

Though Pierre has not become the main character in the Gothic just yet, Isabel's story initiates him into it, preparing him for his journey to the narratively unnamed New York City. The first hint of this experience comes from Isabel's speaking doubly in her first introductions, repeating "And so, thou art my brother;—shall I call thee Pierre," "Thou art!," and "Bless thee!" (Melville, *Pierre* 112). Isabel's exclamation functions like a baptism of abjection, establishing the ambiguous foundation necessary for Pierre's gothic experience, his narcissistic experience of inscribing her with his identity, and his abortive narrative split—one rejected, one unfulfilled.

This ambiguity comes to fruition when Pierre realizes that his cousin, Glendinning Stanley, refuses to acknowledge him and thus refuses him a secure place within the symbolic landscape. At that moment, Pierre stands "erect and isolated" and states: "'By Heaven, had I a knife, Glen, I could prick thee on the spot; let out all thy Glendinning blood, and then sew up the vile remainder'" (Melville, *Pierre* 239). In effect, by renouncing the paternal metaphor—his father's name—it is Pierre who has "let out all [his] Glendinning blood," only to discover that that "vile remainder" leaves him suspended outside the metonymic chain. Expecting to occupy the vacant space Glen originally offered to him, Pierre now finds himself adrift in the city's sea of unanchored signifiers. No longer the Memnon stone, he becomes simply one cobblestone amid a sea of pavements, bricks, and walls.

The narration underscores this aspect of Pierre's experience by making a narrative transition from Pierre's intrusion on Glen's party to the narrative intrusion of the city upon Pierre. Thus, part iii of the chapter begins with the barrage of multiple cries—meaningless, brute signifiers—all repetitious and all anonymous:

“Hack, sir? Hack, sir? Hack, sir?”

“Cab Sir? Cab Sir? Cab Sir?”

“This way sir! This way sir! This way sir!”

“He's a rogue! Not him! he's a rogue!” (Melville, *Pierre* 239)

Like the advances of the prostitute by the druggist's, these statements invade the narrative moment without context, as if they were ahead of the narration. Only after Pierre experiences them does he find himself “surrounded by a crowd of contending hackmen.” But even that context doesn't fully account for the effect of the statements. In their multiplicity they seem to infest the narrative with multiple signification. The words may insult or offer comfort, accuse or offer advice, point out one way or several ways. In short, they have no anchoring point as a referent because Pierre has forfeited his place in the signifying chain. Instead, they act as what Roman Jakobson describes as a “shifter”—“the general meaning of a shifter cannot be defined without a reference to the message” (388). Pierre's experience of abjection becomes compounded with his cousin's refusal to acknowledge him (a refusal which stems from Pierre's own renunciation of the paternal metaphor), and therefore in the city he lacks any “message” or anchoring point in which he can seek reference. Hence, the shouts of the hackmen accentuate the start of Pierre's descent; like Pierre, they have become emptied of meaning. Consequently, Pierre has no choice but to make an appeal to myth in order to narrate himself: “this sudden tumultuous surrounding of him by whip-stalks and lashes, seemed like the onset of the chastising fiends upon Orestes” (240).

Pierre's comparison of himself to Orestes acts as only one part in his search for an alternative signifying structure so that he may "gospelize the world anew, and show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse!" (Melville, *Pierre* 273). The fictional Church of the Apostles becomes the specific location within the real New York City from which Pierre attempts to write himself into oblivion. The edifice itself is a hollowed-out hallowed signifier. "When the substance is gone," the narrator states, "men cling to the shadow. . . . It was thus with the ancient Church of the Apostles—better known, even in its primitive day, under the abbreviation of The Apostles—which, though now converted from its original purpose . . . yet still retained its majestic name" (268). As a physical space, it has been "divided into stores; cut into offices" as well as parceled into apartments (266). The physical layout—especially its relation to both the city in which it exists as well as the relation of its interior spaces to each other—remains, despite Melville's descriptions, difficult to trace with any specificity.<sup>9</sup>

The Apostles as a structure becomes an oneiric nerve center in which Pierre manifests his abjection. The name itself has as one of its multiple possible significations that of the religious follower, yet the building itself has lost any connection with its heavenly Father. Though Pierre may see the "camp-bedstead of his grandfather," in the building itself he sees only "a wilderness of tiles, slate, shingles, and tin" (Melville, *Pierre* 270–271). Indeed, on "the third night following the arrival of the party in the city" Pierre appears as a risen Son, emerging from hell to find not heaven but rather oblivion. He has pushed himself to the edge of identity, and the narration, in both tense and description, supports this effect: "There is no street at his feet; like a profound black gulf the open area of the quadrangle gapes beneath him" (271). Abject, Pierre is continually

reminded of his loss in the phallic “gray and grand old tower; emblem to Pierre of an unshakable fortitude, which, deep rooted in the heart of the earth” looms over him. Pierre does not live in the tower, however. He instead lives in the section the narrator calls an “ambitious erection” that “went a few steps, or rather a few stories, too far” (266). It is from this location that Pierre states to Isabel the law “That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am a nothing. It is all a dream—we dream that we dreamed a dream. . . . From nothing proceeds nothing, Isabel, How can one sin in a dream? . . . I am Pierre” (274).

The full oppressiveness of the gothic afflicts the narration from this point of Pierre’s self-baptism in the void. The ghosts of his choices continue to haunt him, since he himself cannot choose to be abject, nor can he simply declare himself so. Rather, in his attempt to reclaim his self-determination by casting out the “vomit of his loathed identity” he has instead initiated an incomplete self-annihilation (*Pierre* 171). His attempts to pour his identity into Isabel and New York City can never fully repair the gap in his system of signification—he can never re-member a past once he has immemorialized it. Though it cannot be remembered, Pierre remains haunted by the presence of its erasure, as well as his failure to remember himself in the physical presence of the New York cityscape.

This haunting manifests itself in the perceived gaze of the “blue-eyed, mystic mild face in the upper window the old gray tower” which “began to domineer in a very remarkable manner upon Pierre” (Melville, *Pierre* 292). This image of a gazing face recalls the face of the tree while at the same time having characteristics of Lacan’s theory of the gaze. The Lacanian gaze that continually unsettles Pierre comes from a face that,

was something separate, and apart; a face by itself. . . . any thing which is thus a thing by itself never responds to any other thing. If to affirm, be to expand one's isolated self; and if to deny, be to contract one's isolated self; then to respond is a suspension of all isolation. (293)

Yet Pierre needs that isolation in order to become his own signifier and repair the lack that his paternal past initiated in his identity. The phallic tower of The Apostles haunts him in such a way that it continually reminds him of the impossibility of his achieving the object of his desire—be it Isabel, New York, or the Memnon Stone. Despite his efforts to “curtain” the face, “like any portrait” it continues to taunt him with “Vain!” and “Fool!” and “Quit!” That impossibility is why Pierre's only choice fate is suicide, since it is such a thing, as Melville points out, “though contained in themselves, are kept a secret from themselves” (294). Psychoanalytically speaking, in order for Pierre to move from the paternal metaphor to abjection to jouissance, he must end subjectivity altogether.

Pierre cannot read himself in the city (and hence survive in it) because representation has already been closed off to him. This foreclosure accounts for why “Melville has been criticized for making New York unsocial, unreal, unnamed. The landmarks that in any other contemporary work would have the conventional associations given to Broadway, Five Points, the Tombs, and City Park, he leaves abstract and unidentified” (Kelley 146). Thus, Pierre is left, as he says, to ““fight a duel in which all seconds are forbid”” (Melville, *Pierre* 349). He can only experience the city as he does the art gallery, as “the empty and impotent scope of pictures, grandly outlined, but miserably filled” (350). In fact, the only picture that does hold any significance for him, is ““No. 99. *A stranger's head, by an unknown hand*”” (349). Even then, in contemplating “the pervading look” of the portrait, “Pierre was thinking of the chair-portrait [of his father]: Isabel, of the living face” (351–352).<sup>10</sup> From this experience,



Pierre realizes that the materiality of the objects around him have lost all significance, even to the point that Isabel has more of a sense of physical history than he now has.

Isabel, at least, has experienced—however fleetingly—the physical presence of the paternal. Pierre has simply experienced representations of it, only to reject the system of which they were a part, initiating further slippages of signification until signifier and signified can no longer sustain his existence. He has no choice but to dismiss the portrait nervously as “one of the wonderful coincidences, nothing more” while “the feelings of Pierre were entirely untranslatable into any words that can be used.” (Melville, *Pierre* 352–353) Thus, Pierre’s abjection in the city renders signification inaccessible to him, despite his attempts to narrate it both to himself and to the world in the abortive novel he attempts. The only way in which to re-anchor himself without the paternal metaphor, that is, to stop the endless sliding of his own signification by himself, is to first eradicate “the only unoutlawed human being by the name Glendinning” (359). Glendinning Stanley, as Priscilla Wald points out, is a veiled inversion of Pierre’s signifier. “Pierre” means stone in French, and “stan” means the same in Old English (Wald 146). Hence, more than simply supporting mirror imagery, the signifiers themselves move towards a negation—one Pierre describes as being “speechless sweet” (Melville, *Pierre* 359).

Having achieved that subjective negation, Pierre “had extinguished his house” so that he can literally become, in the Tombs, the single stone on which “the long tiers of massive cell-galleries” are “partly piled” (360). In this state, Pierre finally declares, “Pierre is neuter now!” only to die with “one speechless clasp” (362). The declaration that he is “neuter” at his final moment dramatically indicates that he has freed himself of the determinism of the paternal phallic signifier. The final spoken words of the novel,

presumably from Isabel, come “gasping from the wall” of Pierre’s cell—leaving a final ambiguity, as if the city itself finally comes to signify and speak for Pierre.

#### Notes

1. One may also note the potential pun of the name “Memnon Stone.” Though the reference may be to Greek mythology and the Ethiopian king killed by Achilles, there is also the chance that Melville is punning Latin “Memnon” as “Mem-non,” the negation of memory. Hence, the Memnon Stone in Pierre’s view becomes an object that negates historical significance while keeping its presence, one that Pierre himself strives to become, and a concept that Isabel and the unnamed city of New York embody. It is an “immemorial” rather than a memorial.
2. Jaques Lacan describes the “name of the father” thusly: “It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law” (“Function” 66). Hence, the “name of the father” functions as a primary signifier that metaphorically stands in for the desire of the (m)other. The resulting suturing of signification becomes the paternal metaphor, which anchors “the series of substitutions that found social existence” (Hughes 29).
3. The supernatural connotations of Isabel’s “unearthly shriek” (Melville, *Pierre* 45) are slight here, yet Melville leaves an ambiguity as to its supernatural nature—angel, devil, or ghost—though the reader may assume Isabel herself is real in the context of the narration. Still, the ambiguity hints at her unanchored identity and resultant narrative slippage. The narrator also describes Isabel as having “preternatural calmness,” a “face of supernaturalness,” and an “immemorial face” (46–47). The choice of the adjective “immemorial” to describe Isabel’s face works, as its meaning too is ambiguous; it conveys a notion of anti-memory. Stanley Cavell notes in his discussion of Poe (mentioned previously in Chapter 2 of this study) that “the prefix *im-* [such as in the title word “Imp”] that is initially felt to be perverse, since, . . . it has opposite meanings. With adjectives it is a negation or privative, as in . . . *imperfect* . . . ; with verbs it is an affirmation of intensive, as in . . . *imprison* . . .” (23). If Isabel’s face is “immemorial,” then it may signify a form of anti-signification, a negation of memory (reaching beyond or before memory) while at the same emphasizing physical presence.
4. It is worth noting other similarities between Melville’s life and the narrative of *Pierre*. The first of these, of course, is the parallel of the name of Melville’s mother, Maria, and the name of Pierre’s mother, Mary. In addition, Melville’s maternal grandfather, General Peter Gansevoort, whose name is an analog of Pierre [“stone”], was a Revolutionary War hero. His paternal grandfather, Major Thomas Melvill, was also a “celebrated veteran of the Revolution” and had participated in the Boston Tea Party in 1773 (Delbanco 18–19). Melville, like Pierre, was of “double-revolutionary” descent.
5. Van Houte also observes of the schizophrenic patient, “The break between language and the object, which characterizes the signifier and on the basis of which reality is taken

up in a continuous of creation of meaning, has not occurred. Language is therefore not detached from the object to which it refers, such that the latter can set itself up as the representative of the entire content of meaning” (230). In this way, the flow of Isabel’s story works (at least to her) because she and the guitar and her mother are fused as one signifier. It is only at the end of the novel that this potentiality becomes evident to Pierre, when he sees the anonymous portrait to which Isabel also claims a connection.

6. Isabel’s aphasic memory is, in effect, an attempt to signify or to speak the failure of the Paternal Metaphor.

7. “Often, a state of consciousness other than pain will, if deprived of its object, begin to approach the neighborhood of physical pain; conversely, when physical pain is transformed into an objectified state, it (or at least some of its aversiveness) is eliminated” (Scarry 5).

8. The suggestion that the girl is a prostitute may be both obvious and sound, but in the immanent moment as Pierre experiences it—among the continual confusion of the rest of the thoroughfare—her status and the moment itself are left ambiguously sinister. The woman only asks Pierre to “stop a bit” while complimenting him. In order to understand that she is a prostitute, one must first understand the ambiguity in her proposition—her meaning relies on a slippage of signification, a state that alienates Pierre. The gothic undertone to that state manifests itself in her appearance of “unnatural vivacity” and being “horribly lit by the green and yellow rays” (237). She appears as both ghoulish and erotic but certainly threatening, and Pierre takes in all meanings at once in the encounter, unsure of what he has seen. Unlike Robin Molineux when he meets the woman in the scarlet petticoat, Pierre is unable to “read in her eyes what he did not hear in her words” (Hawthorne, “My Kinsman” 76).

9. Melville mentions that The Apostles is “In the lower old-fashioned part of the city, in a narrow street—almost a lane—once filled with demure-looking dwellings, but now chiefly with immense lofty warehouses of foreign importers; and not far from the corner from where the lane intersected with a very considerable but contracted thoroughfare for merchants and their clerks, and their carmen and porters” standing as “a relic of the more primitive time” (Melville, *Pierre* 265). The sentence itself is vertiginous and confusing, even for Melville, and it would seem that when one travels with the narrator though the self-referential but unanchored streets to Pierre’s apartment, one is actually journeying through the oneiric cityscape of Pierre’s abjection. Indeed, at points Melville emphasizes this effect by saying such things as “on Sunday, to walk through [the street on which The Apostles was located], was like walking through an avenue of sphinxes” (269). At one point even, Melville notes that “A mysterious professor of the flute was perched in one of the upper stories of the tower; and often, of silent, moonlit nights, his lofty, melodious notes would be warbled forth over the roofs of the ten thousand warehouses around him—as of yore, the bell had pealed over the domestic gables of a long-departed generation” (270). Though there is seemingly no connection, the image is strikingly similar to one in H.P. Lovecraft’s “The Music of Erich Zann” (1921) in which a mute violinist plays the cello-like viol from the uppermost gable window of a garret, eventually

revealing a timeless cosmic horror to the narrator who both witnesses and hears the playing of the music.

10. There is an ambiguity in the “pervading look” of the stranger’s portrait that Pierre contemplates. In the first meaning, it refers to the general appearance of the painting, but in the second meaning it refers to the omniscient gaze of the vacuous signifier, one that Pierre invests with meaning himself, and that meaning is still a haunting presence of the disavowed paternal metaphor. It echoes the gaze of both the paternal tree and face of Plinlimmon’s tower.

CHAPTER 7  
THE AEON-SILENT MAZE OF UNHUMAN MASONRY:  
LOVECRAFT'S OTHER PLACES

In “Some Notes on a Nonentity,” his brief autobiographical essay published in 1933, H. P. Lovecraft wrote, “It is now clear to me that any actual literary merit I have is confined to tales of dream-life, strange shadow, and cosmic ‘outsideness’ . . . I have no illusions concerning the precarious status of my tales . . .” (562). This “outsideness” puts Lovecraft in a peculiar situation, but one for which his literary predecessors have prepared him. In fact, perhaps that was one of the reasons why he felt so closely connected with Poe, since his descriptions of Poe almost sound like anyone describing Lovecraft today: “Poe’s fame has been subject to curious undulations, and it is now a fashion amongst the ‘advanced intelligentsia’ to minimize his importance both as an artist and as an influence” (*Supernatural* 52). Lovecraft’s sense of being a marginalized Other lurks beneath the surface of his tales, portraying an author grappling with the fact that his perception of himself as a serious artist does not match the current social perception of him as a pulp writer of “weird tales.”

Even today, H. P. Lovecraft remains a marginalized author in American Literature. John Taylor once noted that “it seems one must still apologize for taking Howard Phillips Lovecraft’s fictions seriously, though the time when this situation was true for Poe has passed” (52). His questionable status in the American literary canon fueled Lovecraft’s fascination with the grotesque. His bizarre short fiction, like many of the roots of horror, is personal and psychological. It reveals an author who struggles with literary identity,

and in so doing, brought the abject experience from the psychological to the entelechical through the invention of a Mythos.

That Lovecraft would describe himself as a “Nonentity” demonstrates his self-consciousness of his own minor status as an author in American society. Such a fact implies his awareness that the position “weird fiction” held in the literary canon both reflected and refracted his perceptions of himself and the socio-literary boundaries that confined him. His aptly named 1924 short story, “The Shunned House,” demonstrates this idea—as the narrator observes, “I felt, in my visions, a cosmic and abysmal loneliness; with hostility surging from all sides upon some prison where I lay confined. I seemed bound and gagged, and taunted by the echoing yells of distant multitudes who thirsted for my blood” (133). Lovecraft’s “visions” stemmed from his own experience. Like Poe, who confined and threatened his narrators during a time when Emerson and Thoreau encouraged readers to experience Nature, Lovecraft translated his frustrated experiences into his narrators and a fictional landscape.

In an article he wrote defending the purpose of the United Amateur Press Association (the “United”), Lovecraft proclaims that it “aims to assist those whom other forms of literary influence cannot reach. The non-university man, the invalid, the very young, the elderly; all these are included within our scope” (“For What” 443). Although Lovecraft was vehemently racist, his “scope” seems to include other marginalized members of society. Indeed, in a rousing end to his defense he goes on to say that his vision of the United was as “an university, stripped of every artificiality and conventionality, and thrown open to all without distinction. . . . [where] may the small as well as the great writer know the bliss of appreciation and the glory of recognized

achievement” (444). Lovecraft, himself a “non-university man,” looks to strip “artificiality and conventionality” away from the very elements that alienated both him and his writing. As a result, Lovecraft employs his distinctive style as a political tool, using the grotesque to exaggerate and blur the systems of representation that kept an author such as himself confined.

In addition to these motivations, he has both a strong sense of material history and a profound sense of physical place and the function of it for the subject. In a letter from 1926, he pointed out that:

To all intents & purposes I am more naturally isolated from mankind than Nathaniel Hawthorne himself, who dwelt alone in the midst of crowds. . . . The people of a place matter absolutely nothing to me except as components of the general landscape & scenery. . . . My life lies not in among people but among *scenes*—my local affections are not personal, but topographical & architectural. . . . I am always and outsider—to all scenes and all people—but outsiders have their sentimental preferences in visual environment. . . . It is *New England I must have*—in some form or other. Providence is part of me—I am Providence. (*Lord* 187–188)

Timothy Evans rightly points out that for Lovecraft, “antiquarianism expresses a kind of existential attempt to preserve meaning in a meaningless universe by affirming tradition and by documenting and preserving the physical evidence of tradition in the built environment” (191). Lovecraft’s self-comparison to Hawthorne hints at a greater sense of the past, both literary and material, than just an author seeking to preserve a continuity of meaning. His thought processes hint more at a personal understanding of Hawthorne’s connection to Salem, evident in his interest in what Evans correctly calls a “Colonial Revival ideology” (180).<sup>1</sup>

By itself, this ideology does not fully account for Lovecraft’s deeply personal connection with geography. His haunting words, “Providence is a part of me—I am Providence,” imply that the idea of place began to overshadow the physical place itself,

and so “in some form or other” he began to reshape the New England landscape to fit the idea. They suggest that though Providence is a part of him, it is not all of his identity. Indeed, the levels of meaning allow Lovecraft to play the deity and create an entire paradoxical topography that must be recognized alongside Providence, Salem, Marblehead, and Boston. Both eldritch and premonitory, Arkham, Innsmouth, Dunwich, and the Plateau of Leng push the reader to recognize that behind the tourism lie psychological journeys that are ignored only at one’s own peril.

In order to comprehend fully Lovecraft’s sense of history and alienation, one must understand the kinship that he felt with Edgar Allan Poe. Like Poe, Lovecraft lost a parent when he was only three years old. After his father entered a hospital in 1893, the young author did not see him for the remainder of his father’s life (Lévy 18). Instead, Lovecraft was raised in the house of his maternal grandfather by his two aunts and over-protective mother. His grandfather’s death at the start of Lovecraft’s adolescence in 1904 drove him from the middle-class to poverty. Having been raised to be a gentleman, much like Poe, Lovecraft did not fit in with the lower classes, nor could he be considered a member of the upper classes. By the age of fourteen, Lovecraft started to feel the same alienation Poe felt as a student while at the University of Virginia. In a letter he wrote to his literary friend in the United, Maurice Moe, Lovecraft stated about his childhood, “Thus repelled by humans, I sought refuge and companionship in books” (*Selected Letters I* 7). Considering that he was expected to enroll in Brown University, but that psychosomatic illnesses encouraged by his overprotective mother prevented him from doing so, one sees why Lovecraft began to look to Poe as kindred spirit.



Perhaps one of the most compelling yet largely unexplored reasons why Lovecraft felt detached from American letters and sympathetic with Poe is his keen sense of geography. Lovecraft was born and raised in Providence and spent much of his adult life there as well. Throughout the Nineteenth Century, New England—Massachusetts in particular—was the literary heart of America. Providence, by contrast, was a place of exile and banishment. Given his Victorian prose style and eighteenth-century sensibilities, Lovecraft had a keen sense of history and would have taken the history of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson very seriously. In fact, as George Tindall and David Shi note:

Banished in 1638 as “a woman not fit for our society,” [Hutchinson] walked through the wilderness to Providence. . . . Hutchinson grew sick and her baby was stillborn, leading her critics back in Massachusetts to assert that the “monstrous birth” was God’s way of punishing her for her sins. (27)

It is reasonable to think that a sense of geographical alienation affected Lovecraft as a writer in two ways—that he felt disconnected from his New England literary lineage, and that he felt he shared this common bond with Poe. When Poe published his 1827 *Tamerlane and Other Poems* he used the pseudonym “A Bostonian,” which “verifies his desire to distance himself from [John] Allan and Virginia” (Hayes 17).

Although Poe wanted to move away from John Allan, Poe’s feelings were also based in a sense of geographical inferiority about the South—a shadow with which many southern writers still grapple. Lovecraft built part of his identity on this shadow of Poe. O. R. Dathorne hints at this possibility by stating how nineteenth-century American identity was based on mainly on a British model:

In a way, Britain had reared its own monster. First, it had exported slightly resentful, yet nostalgic, kith and kin. The elites who had prospered had proclaimed a new aristocratic status, copied from, yet independent of, Britain’s control. . . .

However, the new American aristocrats clung to the belief in the possibility of being admitted to the old, closed, upper echelons of British society. (10)

As a gentleman and an author, Poe had hoped to be admitted to this new aristocracy.

Failing, he sought to subvert it. Even the term associated with these discussions,

“monster,” indicates the subversive potential of the grotesque:

In part, [monsters] are images of horror not because they do dreadful things to us . . . but because they block our attempts to classify, categorize, and hence control them. . . . our fears are carried within the word itself, for ‘monster’ in medical terminology refers to a fetus that is abnormal, combining human with something else, literally grotesque. But such ‘monsters’ clearly threaten our classifying systems not our well-being. (Twitchell 24)

This shadow of Poe’s failure becomes, then, a paradoxical model for Lovecraft’s hopes to dissolve social and intellectual boundaries that kept him poor and unrecognized. Indeed, he becomes, in every sense of the term, a ghostwriter.

Just as Poe sought to accelerate the limits of signification with his stories, Lovecraft uses his prose to shift abjection from the teleological to the anti-Oedipal, essentially using the fractured potential of the fantastic to realign the subject in a state of becoming. He accomplishes this task by establishing a real geography, alongside which he creates a fictional geography rooted in the real locations. Exploring this psychotopography<sup>2</sup> and the rift it opens, Lovecraft ushers in physical monstrosities that then begin to undermine the primacy of all of the locations and their significations. The resulting grotesque plummets the Oedipal aspects of both the subject and the landscape toward abjected oblivion, exaggerating and blurring his authorial marginality. These techniques establish an anti-teleological, atavistic mythos that exists as an entelechy of becoming.

In “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” (written in 1927 but published posthumously), Lovecraft’s narrator points out that Joseph Curwin, the “antecedent and

horror” of Charles Dexter Ward, “fled from Salem to Providence—that universal haven of the odd, the free, and the dissenting” (99). The reader finds in Lovecraft’s tales that same sort of fleeing. Discontented with Realist traditions, he instead takes the base of that approach—materialism—and uses it as a mode for the fantastic base of weird literature. Moreover, Lovecraft uses that base to avoid the underlying deterministic message of Naturalism while capitalizing on its best grotesque potentials. Thus, unlike Poe but like Hawthorne, he situates his reader at a very recognizable geographical location and then slowly begins to alienate that location until the reader not only experiences its abject dimensions but also feels compelled to revisit that experience almost as if it were a familiar place. Towns such as Arkham, Innsmouth, and Dunwich are fictional towns that become realms in which Lovecraft feels authority rather than subordination. As Lévy notes, “These imaginary places form, in the real topography of New England, a zone of shadow, a zone of mystery, a dream-zone, which spreads little by little to the rest of the countryside, contaminating the diurnal space of the maps and charts and giving it a suddenly different aspect” (37). Providence thus becomes no farther from the unnamable than Antarctica.

Thus, both literally and metaphorically, Lovecraft becomes what Deleuze and Guattari term “deterritorialized”; his writing begins to maintain “interior milieus . . . on its own stratum” which assure “its autonomy [while] bringing it into a set of aleatory relations with the exterior” (*Thousand Plateaus* 53–54). In other words, Lovecraft’s writing takes on a rhizomatic nature in a spiritual and psychological alliance with Poe. Rejected in the existing territory (both geographical and literary), he creates his own, in order to force a redefinition of what the term means. Poe attempted the same task; he

wanted the dominant literary culture of the time to accept his writings as a certain form of Transcendentalism, only to be rejected by Emerson, the father figure of the culture (Silverman 265). Yet Poe's feelings only account for half of this literary alienation, since "much of Poe's thinking about Transcendentalism only reflects the tumult of his feelings about Boston." Thus, just as Poe turns the arborescent Boston into the more grotesque "Frogpondium" (Hayes 17), Lovecraft transforms New England into a hell on Earth where social conventions are discarded. As his literary career progresses, Lovecraft's stories are as much about the place as much as they are about his protagonists.

It comes as no surprise that Lovecraft chose to write about "some violation or transcending of fixed cosmic law—an imaginative escape from palling reality—[where] *phenomena* rather than *persons* are the logical 'heroes'" ("Some Notes" 562). It seems appropriate to substitute "social" for "cosmic" in Lovecraft's works, since "in that chaotic world in which monsters move all around us, we recognize . . . our own world. . . . everything could be monstrous, alien" (Ibars 17). Consequently, Lovecraft's writing also becomes deterritorialized; both his subject matter and his style of writing do not fit in with the manner of the time.

Perhaps no other story Lovecraft has written exemplifies his acceptance of himself as a marginalized author more than his 1921 story, "The Outsider." This tale recounts the experiences of a nameless narrator who lives alone in a decaying castle in a realm that has no natural light. Surrounded by a dense, tall forest, the narrator never wanders far from the castle because of his fear of becoming lost. The only possible access to light comes from "a well-nigh impossible climb up the sheer wall" of a "black tower which reached above the trees into the unknown outer sky" (43). Upon reaching the roof of the

tower, he discovers he is on solid ground in what appears to be a graveyard. He then wanders to a “venerable ivied castle” that is “maddeningly familiar, yet full of perplexing strangeness to [him]” (47). Entering the castle, the narrator encounters a panicked dinner party. Thinking that something “might be lurking near [him] unseen,” he turns to encounter an “inconceivable, indescribable, and unmentionable monstrosity” (48). In an effort to “ward off the foetid apparition”, the narrator’s fingers touch the “paw of the monster,” only to discover that he is gazing at himself in a mirror.

The most important aspect of this encounter, the narrator’s interpretation of the dinner party, forces him into an unknowing prejudgment of himself before he has an opportunity to understand that he is the cause of the panic. He describes the panic as “one of the most terrifying demonstrations I had ever conceived,” and states that, “The cries were shocking; and as I stood . . . listening to their vanishing echoes, I trembled at the thought of what might be lurking near me unseen” (“Outsider” 47). This experience initiates the narrator to the abject before he realizes that he is the embodiment of it. Thus, the subject becomes predetermined by signifiers he has yet to comprehend fully.

“Such a lot the gods gave to me, the dazed, the disappointed; the barren, the broken,” states the tale’s nameless narrator at the start of the story, “And yet I am strangely content . . . when my mind momentarily threatens to reach beyond to *the other*” (Lovecraft, “Outsider” 43). By starting his story with these reflections, the narrator immediately places himself in the realm of the Lacanian imaginary. By hinting to the reader that he has already left the “*Innenwelt*” and moved into the “*Umwelt*” (Lacan, “Mirror” 6), the narrator impresses upon the reader that he is an individual who cannot be fully represented by any system of rules or classification. This irreversible movement

seems to occur when he moves through the trap door in the high tower, trying “to prevent the heavy slab from falling back into place; but failed in the . . . attempt” (Lovecraft, “Outsider” 45). Upon returning, he finds the “stone trap-door immovable.” Yet, though he experiences what might be taken as a mirror stage, it seems inverted and jumbled. The Outsider does not seem to have a past, though he does have memories. The image he sees in the mirror is more of an “anti-I” than what Lacan terms the “ideal-I” (“Mirror” 4)—his is an ego in a continual state of becoming.

Hence the importance of the narrator’s namelessness—as Ibars suggests, “man gives names to things so as not to fear them; the chaos that manifests itself is not chaos anymore” (17). The narrator’s lack of a Lacanian “nom du père,” therefore, manifests not his identity, but his subversion of classification—he is a monstrous real object that obliterates the “non du père” by folding it back on itself. The mirror stage for the narrator serves as an identification with the abject, and by so doing provides him with not an “ontological structure of the human world” but rather an ontological structure *outside* the human world (Lacan, “Mirror” 4). The narrator describes the image in the mirror as a “putrid, dripping eidolon of unwholesome revelation” which turns out to be his own decaying corpse-like body (Lovecraft, “Outsider” 48).

Lovecraft’s choice of the word “eidolon” suits the moment, since it indicates an unstable apparition or phantom as well as an ideal form.<sup>3</sup> For the Outsider, the gestalt of his reflected image never fully comes together; it is only “eaten-away and bone revealing outlines” wearing “disintegrating apparel.” He is a corpse recognizing himself as the abject. As Julia Kristeva observes,

The corpse . . . that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death. . . a wound with blood and pus, or the sickly acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does

not *signify* death. . . . refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live . . . .the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. (3)

Rather than initiating the subject into the social body, this process thrusts Lovecraft's narrator to the edges of that social body, and does so primarily because of the narrator's physical condition.

"But in the cosmos there is balm as well as bitterness," the narrator states, "and that balm is nepenthe" (Lovecraft, "Outsider" 49). Lacan points out that the mirror stage "is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual's formation into history" ("Mirror" 6). Yet the narrator of "The Outsider" experiences what for him is "a single and fleeting avalanche of soul-annihilating memory" that vanishes "in a chaos of echoing images" (49). Thus it seems that rather than decisively projecting the narrator's formation into history, his experience in front of the mirror projects him beyond history into a larger, self-made history that obliterates conventional coherent subjectivity. "I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men." Embracing this realization, he resituates himself in an eldritch form of signification filled with his own signifiers. "I was not sorry," he tells the reader, "Now I ride . . . on the night-wind, and play by day amongst the catacombs of Nephren-Ka" (49). Referencing names such as "Neb" and "Nitokris," allows him to "almost welcome the bitterness of alienage."

Telescoping time works in the opposite direction from the way it works in Poe's tales. Rather than compressing time to the immanent moment in order to obliterate history, Lovecraft extends the narrative out of time on a scale so large that history itself becomes meaningless. The narrator escapes the fractured imaginary imposed on him in death by embracing a new hyperbolic form of the symbolic. Thus, whereas Poe's tales

are more than moments but less than narratives, Lovecraft's tales are brushes with the abject that take on the same traits, but placed within a time scale that renders the human experience meaningless, and by so doing pushes it to the borders of oblivion. As a result, it helps to form the basis of a gothic mythos that links itself to the psychotopography of American gothic literature.

For the outsider, the past is without history, and memories lack any foundation for narrative. The Outsider embraces his abject place, though he cannot return to the imaginary ("Innenwelt") and holds no place in the symbolic ("Umwelt") save along its borders and burrows. Moreover, S. T. Joshi suggests that the Outsider is a "long-dead ancestor of the current occupants" of the castle he enters (*Call*, Explanatory 373). Rather than denying or erasing the paternal metaphor, Lovecraft physically disintegrates it by making the ancestral figure a corpse—the Outsider is the only basis for an anchoring point, and he is the abject. Lovecraft strengthens this idea as his tales progress, slowly building not a fictional geography, but rather a parallel one where both colonial and American mindsets become meaningless in the shadow of a much larger and older structure. In reanchoring the significations to which his subjectivity is bound, The Outsider achieves what Melville's Pierre Glendinning cannot, despite his having a similar situation to Isabel. He has literacy but no speech, whereas Isabel had speech but no literacy. Both ultimately end up in the tombs.

In order to better understand the development of Lovecraft's psychotopography, one needs to begin with Lovecraft's immediate surroundings and see how that landscape spreads outward. One must remember that this landscape does not develop in an organized manner. Lovecraft does not set one tale in Providence, another in Salem, yet



another in Boston, and invent Arkham because he has run out of real places. Instead, the landscape develops in a serpiginous fashion, simultaneously real and unreal. Lovecraft's New England landscape does have a real anchor in Providence, Boston, and Salem, and Maurice Lévy points out that it is "a world whose reality—physical, topographical, historical—should be emphasized" because "the truly fantastic exists only where the impossible can make an irruption" (36–37). Interestingly enough, that real physical landscape rests on the foundations set down primarily by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Lovecraft understood Hawthorne, calling him the "scion of antique Salem" who has "a gentle soul cramped by the Puritanism of early New England" and for whom "the visible world becomes in his fancy a theatre of infinite tragedy and woe, with unseen half-existent influences hovering over it and through it" (*Supernatural* 61). It seems ironic that Lovecraft states "Hawthorne left no well-defined literary posterity" (66), considering that his stories expand on the landscape that Hawthorne helped to make legendary.

Just as Hawthorne's landscape started from Salem and incorporated Boston, Milford, and Merry Mount (Quincy), Lovecraft anchors his geography in Salem. Phillip A. Shreffler points out how "In Lovecraft's hands, bustling Salem was transformed into the crumbling and ancient Arkham," with the intention "to project the image of the most representative or archetypal New England town, as well as a locale invested with the deepest of New England's horrific tradition" (76–77). Though Arkham, Massachusetts, may be anchored in Salem, in Lovecraft's psychotopography the two towns coexist and share similar regional histories. Whereas Hawthorne declared, "I am a citizen of somewhere else" in his "Custom-House" introduction (157), Lovecraft declared "I am Providence" while qualifying it with "I am always an outsider—to all scenes and all

people” (*Lord* 187–188). Thus, Arkham is also rooted in Providence, a fact that manifests itself in the Brown University-inspired Miskatonic University in the heart of Arkham. Consequently, Lovecraft weaves his own beloved Providence, and consequently himself, into the legendary history of the New England landscape. As a result, one follows a geographical web that has its roots in both a real and literary Salem, Providence, and Boston, and then branches out into Arkham, Dunwich, Innsmouth, and Kingsport. It then moves to Antarctica, while at the same time incorporating the landscapes of Poe, the depths of the South Pacific, and beyond to the cosmic realms of Kadath, Sarnath, and Leng. As Maurice Lévy points out, “Arkham and its vicinity are, in the Lovecraftian topography, the fault through which the bizarre, the horrific, the disquieting, the morbid, and the unclean spread” (37).

Since Lovecraft’s New England is rooted in both Salem and Providence, and since he once wrote, “psychologically speaking, I am and always will be [in Providence]” (*Lord* 187), then it makes sense to examine first the two most significant tales he set there—“The Shunned House” (1924), and “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” (1927). Conflating the self with the topography, Lovecraft uses Providence as a primary signifier to anchor his mythos. He works outward from this topos, surrendering his narrative to a sense of what he terms “*beyondness*” (“Mountains” 270). The very signifier blends randomness as well as determinism, location and self, while forming a core topos of his tales.

In a fashion very similar to Hawthorne, Lovecraft chooses a real physical house—135 Benefit Street in Providence—as “The Shunned House.” Unlike Hawthorne, Lovecraft does not write a “Romance” as much as he sets out to explore the phenomenon

of the house itself. In *The House of the Seven Gables* the characters serve to express what Hawthorne sees as the “romantic” side of the actual house, and without the location of Salem and the physical house, the Pyncheons and Maules would simply be mere fiction rather than what Hawthorne calls “Legend” (351). Lovecraft, on the other hand, makes the house his main character, and relies both on its history and materiality to bring his story to its anti-climax. Both Hawthorne and Lovecraft seek to “connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us” (Hawthorne, *House* 351), but Lovecraft’s temporal scope extends far beyond “a by-gone time” and invests the present with the impending momentum of the past as if it is bearing down on both the narrator and the reader. His symbolic universe attempts to circumvent the break in the symbolic chain by returning to a mythic past that existed, and continues to exist, before the subject’s flawed emergence into the symbolic.

In “The Shunned House,” the narrator, after a great deal of historical research, recounts the seemingly cursed history of the house at its location in Providence. He mentions that “the house was never regarded by the solid part of the community as in any real sense ‘haunted’” (Lovecraft, “Shunned” 92). Instead, its occupants apparently all died from being “insidiously sapped, so that each one died the sooner from whatever tendency to weakness he may have naturally had.” The noxious character of the house seemed strongest in the cellar, which, because the house is built into the side of College Hill, is at sidewalk level and grows strange fungi from the floor in the shape of a doubled up human. A series of wasting deaths, stillborn children, a case of madness, and rumors of a curse on the house leave it uninhabitable until June 25, 1919, when the narrator and his uncle—Dr. Elihu Whipple—decide to keep a vigil in the cellar and attempt to find out

the source of the horrors. During the course of the vigil, both the narrator and the uncle have horrific dreams and witness an almost luminous vapor by the fireplace. Dr. Whipple suffers a “nauseous liquefaction” and death, after which the narrator flees from the cellar. He returns later that day, digs underneath the floor, and finds a “fishy and glassy—a kind of semi-putrid congealed jelly with suggestions of translucency” that looks like “a mammoth stove pipe doubled in two” which the narrator assumes to be the “titan elbow” of an “unthinkable abnormality” (114). The narrator destroys the vampiric thing by pouring six carboys of sulfuric acid on it, and the house appears to lose its curse.

A mixture of haunted house and monster story, the tale begins by associating the house with history and contrasting it with fiction. The narrator mentions that Poe used to frequent the Benefit Street neighborhood while wooing Sarah Whitman (Lovecraft, “Shunned” 90). The narrator continues:

Now the irony is this. In this walk, so many times repeated, the world’s greatest master of the terrible and the bizarre was obliged to pass a particular house on the eastern side of the street. . . . It does not appear that he ever wrote or spoke of it, nor is there any evidence that he even noticed it. And yet that house, to the two persons in possession of certain information, equals or outranks in horror the wildest phantasy of the genius who so often passed it unknowingly, and stands starkly leering as a symbol of all that is unutterably hideous. (90)

By introducing the subject of his tale this way, Lovecraft accomplishes several things at once. First, he anchors the house in an American historical context and infuses it with some literary significance by making it an object associated with Edgar Allan Poe. Secondly, he contributes to the reality of tale by contrasting it with Poe’s bizarre tales. Most importantly, and perhaps most cleverly as well, Lovecraft self-effacingly at once places his writing skills on a par with Poe while at the same time showing how the physical material presence of the house makes the tale that much more horrific simply because it is real. He cements this effect by beginning his next sentence, “The house

was—and for that matter still is—of a kind to attract the curious.” The subtle self-correction emphasizes the continuing physical presence of the shunned Stephen Harris house at 135 Benefit Street, and hints at its potential for ongoing horror.

In 1930, Lovecraft wrote to Clark Ashton Smith a partial explanation of his view of weird literature:

The more I consider weird fiction, the more I am convinced that a solidly realistic framework is needed in order to build up a preparation for the unreal element. . . . When a story fails to emphasize, by contrast with reality, the utter strangeness and abnormality of the wonders it depicts, it likewise fails to make those wonders seem like anything more than aimless puerility. (*Lord* 210)

Thus, there is a basis in genre for his choice of real places like the house at 135 Benefit Street—a justification that has a necessary notion of transgression embedded within it. But as a focus of phenomena, the Stephen Harris house also works because of its physical structure and historic location. “It faced south, with one gable end buried to the lower windows in the eastward rising hill, and the other exposed to the foundations toward the street. . . . giving the deep cellar a street frontage with door and two windows above ground, close to the new line of public travel” (Lovecraft, “Shunned” 91). This house, in addition to its actual odd past, serves as an interstitial opening between two worlds because its cellar rests on the same plane as street level. Hence, the physical layout of the house appears as the manifestation of the site of abjection, and also gives insight into Lovecraft’s psychotopography.

The house embodies a spirit of Providence itself for Lovecraft, but that spirit is an underside of New England. The focal point of the house is the cellar, and as Gaston Bachelard suggests, the cellar is “first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths” (18). The cellar is the only space in Bachelard’s topography

of the domestic sphere that he marks with alienation and continual irrationality. Indeed, there is a “buried madness” in the shunned house (20). Yet Lovecraft makes a habit of this type of imagery, using metonymy to convey both physical threat and psychological horror in a signifying chain that forms the fabric of his dark and legend-haunted New England landscape. In “The Festival” (1923), Lovecraft suggests how the “black gravestones stuck ghoulishly through the snow like the decayed fingernails of a gigantic corpse” (110).<sup>4</sup> In “Under the Pyramids” (1924), he describes “that five-headed monster as large as a hippopotamus . . . the five headed monster—and that of which it is the merest fore paw . . .” (77). “The Shunned House” presents this literary tool in a more subtle but more anchored way, since the “mammoth soft blue-white stovepipe doubled in two” is the “titan elbow” of the vampiric entity below the house (114). In the traditional sense, the part represents the whole, and thus by showing the elbow the reader is left to imagine the monstrous entity that comprised the foundation of the house itself. By extension, the one house manifests a potential spread of alienage throughout Providence itself.

Lovecraft achieves this effect by incorporating a meticulous historical record of the house. Unlike Hawthorne, who invented the Pyncheon history in order to give it a supernatural aspect, Lovecraft’s circumstances are more real than not. Benefit Street was altered and bodies were moved to accommodate the work (Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft* 349). There was a documented case of suspected vampirism in Exeter, RI, in 1892. The character of Jaques Roulet (the supposed ancestor of fictional Etienne Roulet) was a real person who in 1598 was “was condemned to death as a daemoniac but afterward saved from the stake by the Paris parliament and shut in a madhouse” (Lovecraft, “Shunned”

103). Indeed, even Mrs. Stephen Harris was “often heard to cry out in French from one of the second story windows” (Shreffler 94). By assembling this legendary history, Lovecraft suggests an alternate history of Providence that both acknowledges its colonial history while rendering that history meaningless. Unlike Irving, who sought alternate paternal figures for America in the New York Dutch, Lovecraft does not seek to erase America’s history as a British colony. Rather, Lovecraft extends the temporal scope of signification such that the paternal presence of Britain (or any European ancestor) becomes both anchoring and insignificant.

Thus, “The Shunned House” itself has nothing wrong with it. The foundation on which it is built—the very land upon which it rests—holds the aberration. In this way, Lovecraft uses metonymy as a trope but employs metaphor psychologically. The elbow represents the infectivity of a perverse and abyssal underworld, the house comes to represent the presence and malevolence of that infection, and Providence begins to amplify and radiate the spirit of the house in that the city itself is comprised of many houses. Though the narrator of the tale appears to destroy the “unthinkable abnormality” (Lovecraft, “Shunned” 114), for both the reader and the narrator, its absence still remains as a threatening presence, a haunting reminder of an encounter with the abject. Oddly, Lovecraft mingles a celebratory effect about this encounter when his narrator states, “It is still spectral, but its strangeness fascinates me and I shall find mixed with my relief a queer regret when it is torn down to make way for a tawdry shop or vulgar apartment building. The barren old trees in the yard have begun to bear small, sweet apples, and last year the birds nested in the gnarled boughs” (115). It is precisely that “queer regret”

which remains to shift Lovecraft's psychotopography from the abject to what Deleuze and Guattari term "deterritorialized" (*Kafka* 15).

"Americanism implies freedom, progress, and independence," writes Lovecraft in 1919, "but it does not imply a rejection of the past, nor a renunciation of traditions and experience" ("Americanism" 266). Lovecraft's psychotopography flourishes because it is at once anti-teleological and anti-oedipal. Whereas Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne sought to resituate their geographies in an American post-colonial ideal that somehow denied the inaugural sense of lack, Lovecraft revels in the connections brought about by the very idea of New England. For him, New England seems England in a state of becoming, a regressive state of bordering, a phenomenon of geographical representation. That becoming is perversely backward looking, celebrating a New Eden not as a fresh start, but rather as one step closer to oblivion. One pushes the argument too far to imply that Lovecraft penned a minor literature or to say that his tales somehow escape the bonds of the paternal metaphor without consequence. Yet, there exists in his tales a fascination along with the horror. Victoria Nelson observes that Lovecraft's fiction approaches "a similar experience to . . . 'posttraumatic games' that children who have been kidnapped, raped, or otherwise mistreated typically invent" (134).<sup>5</sup> If this is the case, then approaching the expression of the Real—even if in a celebratory manner—still retains some consequence. Merging with the *objet a* effects an apocalypse; it reveals an incomprehensible amount of energy while annihilating its surroundings.

If America as a post-colonial nation was still struggling with its identity in relation to paternal England, Lovecraft unseats the paternal by making it unpaternal, or replacing England with the "Old Ones"—great demon-like gods that predate history and man. He



then burrows them deep into and around the landscape. Moreover, Lovecraft's demons are not supernatural, they are physically real while being multi-dimensional. In this way, Lovecraft circumvents the Oedipal cycle inherent in trying to establish an "American" literature. Moreover, it allows him to negotiate the dichotomies set up by geographical teleologies. Though Rhode Island may be historically seen as an offshoot of the original Massachusetts colonies, Lovecraft creates the heterotopias of Arkham and the Miskatonic Valley to unseat that dichotomy. They are places where temporal unity breaks down, and thus the determination of the subject becomes increasingly less teleological. "The reason why *time* plays a great part in so many of my tales is that this element looms up in my mind as the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe. Conflict with time seems to me the most potent and fruitful theme in all human expression" ("Notes on Writing Weird Fiction" 113). Michel Foucault points out "Time probably appears to us only as one of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in space" ("Of Other" 23). Hence, it is only through the focal point of the heterotopia that one can experience what Foucault terms "heterocronies"—"a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" ("Of Other" 26).

As Washington Irving looks to establish a psychic heterotopia for the expression of the American postcolonial condition, Lovecraft uses Providence as a focus for a counterattack of sorts. Unlike Irving's, Lovecraft's fiction does not seek to set up an "American" New England by celebrating independence or renouncing a colonial past. Rather, Lovecraft sets up his New England as a heterochronic place that synergizes both the colonial heritage and the distinctiveness of the American landscape.<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne only touched upon this potential paradox with *The House of the Seven Gables* by using

Salem's haunted history as a phenomenon within his tale. Had Matthew Maule been innocent of witchcraft, then his curse on the Pyncheons would be justified; yet his cursing of the Pyncheons brings him into the realm of witchcraft, thereby making him guilty as well as innocent. Maule's guilt or innocence becomes inconsequential as a result, and the phenomenon of the cycle of violence and haunting manifest in the tangible material world becomes the engine on which the gothic atmosphere runs. Lovecraft seizes on this aspect of the New England heterotopia, even stating, "It was almost a pity to supply a fairly happy ending" but qualifying that the "occasional glimpses [of terror] amply serve to sustain the mood and redeem the work from pure allegorical aridity" (*Supernatural* 65). He celebrates this phenomena of haunting, and focuses in on it, using Providence as his physical conduit to both the past and the extra-temporal.

For Irving, the ocean provided a temporary heterotopic space because of its multidimensionality—the seascape is both horizontal and vertical, and the verticality of the unknown depths provided just the right amount of uncertainty to provoke a slight brush with potential abjection. (Perhaps for this reason Lovecraft chooses to make the ocean the home of such creatures as Dagon, Cthulhu, and the Deep Ones). Melville also used the verticality of the sea in order to lend fearfulness to his sea monster, Moby Dick.

Perhaps the most threatening moment of the novel occurs as Ahab

peered down and down into its depths, he profoundly saw a white living spot no bigger than a white weasel, with wonderful celerity uprising, and magnifying as it rose, till it turned, and there were plainly revealed two long crooked rows of white, glistening teeth, floating up from the undiscoverable bottom. . . . [Moby-Dick's] vast, shadowed bulk still half blending with the open blue of the sea. The glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble tomb. (Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 549)

The terror of this moment stems from the realization that the threat comes from beneath—from a direction that normally does not threaten. In terms of archeology, that

verticality translates into temporality—making the underneath more aligned with the past. Hawthorne’s houses remain connected to the gentlemanly Romance in part because the House of the Seven Gables and the Province House have no basement in the tales. Melville’s New York and Poe’s House of Usher and Antarctic, on the other hand, provide readers with the tombs and maelstroms that loom from below.

The Shunned House brings the basement to street level, and reveals a glimpse that the foundations of Providence, and perhaps all of New England, are corrupt and abysmal. Lovecraft spreads this intimation as Providence becomes vertical in “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” (1927).<sup>7</sup> Ward, “an antiquarian from infancy,” begins to research the history of Providence and ultimately discovers as he comes of age that a suspected runagate named Joseph Curwin who had come from Salem to Providence in 1692 is his maternal great-great-great grandfather. The story then exposes the known history of Curwin and the “vague horrors and daemonic alliances” surrounding him: his marriage to Eliza Tillinghast, the birth of their daughter, his strange scientific inquiries, and the rumors of a vast series of underground catacombs that surrounded his Pawtuxet farm as well as his house on Olney Court (104). Ultimately, fearful town elders decide to kill Curwin and erase his name from the town’s history. Ward’s discovery of an ancient portrait begins a series of events during the course of which Ward becomes increasingly hermetic and esoteric in his researches. This social removal coincides with several acts of grave-robbing, and the family doctor, Marinus Willett, discovers that Curwin has taken possession of Ward’s identity after being resurrected by his great-great-great grandson and killing him. Willett then takes it upon himself to destroy Curwin, who is now passing as Ward.

“The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” marks itself as working from within a frankly Oedipal framework but also desperately attacking that framework. What marks the tale from the near beginning is how the narrator of Part I: “A Result and A Prologue” characterizes Ward’s “madness” as stemming in part from his fascination with the past and its material presence: “These tastes are important to remember in considering his madness; for although they do not form its absolute nucleus, they play a prominent part in its superficial form” (“Case” 92). The “madness” refers to the possession of the descendant’s identity by his ancestor, or a merciless perpetuation of a paternal metaphor.<sup>8</sup> Hence the teleological implications of “Result and Prologue” slowly become clear. The fascination with the past is not the issue, but rather the teleology infused in that past by its perpetuation of the Oedipal triangle and how the triangle becomes manifest in the present.

Central to that presence of the past is once again the material object, and respectfully taking a page from Hawthorne, Lovecraft makes that object a portrait of Joseph Curwin.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Lovecraft gives the portrait more significance by making it by the real painter Cosmo Alexander, “since famous as the early teacher of Gilbert Stuart” (“Case” 108). A mirroring effect occurs as the portrait begins to reflect several significances. The portrait is painted by the European teacher of a since famous American artist who is best known for his portraits of the “Founding Fathers.” Furthermore, the restoration of the painting reveals that “through some trick of atavism the physical contours of Joseph Curwin had found precise duplication after a century and a half” in the features of Charles Dexter Ward (133). In fact, in a way that echoes both Hawthorne and “The Outsider,” the portrait “stared back at [Ward] like a year-adding and

century-recalling mirror” (136). Finally, the portrait, painted on a panel of Curwin’s old library, reveals behind it the “Journall and Notes of Jos: Curwin, Gent., of Providence-Plantations, Late of Salem” among other hidden papers of the ancestor (134). Thus, Lovecraft strives to amplify what he called the “somber reflections” of “the dark Puritan age of concealed horror and witch-whispers” present in Hawthorne’s work, and he accomplishes this task by making that past more materially present.

In Lovecraft’s New England, a curse is not enough to bring about a “concealed horror” as it is in Hawthorne’s Salem. As Curwin’s letter to fellow occultist Simon Orne points out, “Yett will this availe Nothing if there be no Heir, and if the Saltes, or the Way to make the Saltes, bee not Readie for his Hande” (“Case” 130). Lovecraft’s horror is not metaphysical as Poe’s is. Instead, Lovecraft’s horror pulls the metaphysical to make it parapsychical, and then retroactively roots the Puritan “witch-whispers” of New England in that horror, especially with the character of Joseph Curwin.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Lovecraft navigates the abstract metaphysics of Poe and the anticlimactic happy ending of Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables*. With the material realism and physical grotesque in stories like “The Shunned House” and “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward,” Lovecraft has no need to pre-antique his tales.

Instead, he places America’s colonial history in the much larger context of both the parapsychical and the extra-historical. Consequently, when the reader situates the narrative back within a traditional historical context, patriarchal signifiers become impotent. The Salem “witches” are not supernatural, nor are they sinning against the Christian God. They are, however, stepping through human natural law loopholes that place human existence at risk of annihilation. In the cases of Joseph Curwin and Charles

Dexter Ward the immediate risk is to one man's physical identity, but the implications extend far beyond that, given that Lovecraft hints through found letters that Curwin and Simon Orne were resurrecting great historical figures to help round out their diabolical knowledge. As Orne writes to Curwin, "Meanwhile forget not I am desirous of B. F. [Benjamin Franklin] if you can possibly get him for me. You know G. in Philada. better than I. Have him up first if you will, but doe not use him soe hard he will be Difficult" (170). The two wizards seek to resurrect a founding *father* and repurpose his signification in accordance with a different, eldritch chain of signification that reinforces a prior history than the American colonial narrative. That potential, given that Franklin is just one of the people they seek to redistribute along an older and seemingly infinite chain of signification, threatens to obliterate human history.

Lovecraft heightens the suggestion of physical horror by creating underneath Curwin's farmhouse a vast network of subterranean tunnels that have "oddly pierced slabs" along the floor, "as if they might be crude trap doors leading down to some still deeper region of horror" ("Case" 180). Thus, the basement of the Shunned House has now become magnified in scope both on a physical and an historical scale, and runs beneath the better part of southeast Providence and surrounding area, with its "Tartarean wells" holding abject creatures that are "too palpably *unfinished*"—creatures which do eat but do not need to (181–182). Essentially Lovecraft begins to hollow out the New England landscape in order to resituate it within a more modern anti-teleological framework, paradoxically one based in an infinitely older and larger chain of signification. Indeed, one of Curwin's fellow wizards, Edward Hutchinson, signs one of his mysterious letters as "Nephren-Ka nai Hadoth," loosely connecting Providence with

larger, alienated world of “The Outsider” (172). By establishing that connection, Lovecraft positions Providence in such a way that the real location becomes increasingly subject to the threat of obliteration by a larger order of signification that undoes teleology.

That teleology begins with the post-colonial mindset of early America, a mindset that is pre-determined by turns of the Oedipal cycle. By the time Lovecraft was writing his tales, America, though still a post-colonial nation, was stepping out from the Oedipal shadow after World War I. This fact seems refracted in the anti-Oedipal style of Lovecraft’s phenomena. Dr. Willet, after encountering the “thing” in the well, “repeated the Lord’s Prayer to himself; eventually trailing into a mnemonic hodge-podge like the modernistic *Waste Land* of Mr. T. S. Eliot” (182). Patriarchal language breaks down and devolves continually until it becomes cryptic and almost unpronounceable—just a presence of writing or sound with significance, but an unknowable one—since the paternal metaphor has lost its meaning as one looks into the face of timeless abjection.

The narration culminates with the obliteration of both ancestor and heir in order to resolve the generational conflict, but Lovecraft reveals that Curwin is not just a colonial ancestor. Indeed, the found note in Willet’s pocket attests that his consciousness dates back at least to the Eighth or Ninth Century A. D. (192). Materiality seems to be that which also undoes Curwin, as one of the graves he digs up in order to obtain the salts for resurrection has been mismarked due to past movement of gravestones (194). When those salts are resurrected, whatever scrawled the note in Latin turned out to be an unknown enemy of Curwin. More important, before he kills Curwin Willet must first make “a great purgation” by destroying Curwin’s Portrait—an event that the narrator

describes as “nerve-racking” (199). Behind his actions looms an anti-oedipal sentiment: “It is no business of mine if any man seeks duality; *provided he has any right to exist at all, and provided he does not destroy what called him out of space*” (203). Here lies the paradox of “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”; in seeking his identity through the material past, Ward initiates an exaggeration of the paternal presence that ultimately consumes his identity. Once invoked, the prescriptive paternal presence can only be undone through oblivion for Ward the descendant. One should note also that Dr. Willet assumes the responsibility, whereas Ward’s father is almost helpless in confronting the abjection present in Curwin’s catacombs, fainting at the smell of them and becoming “weak-voiced” (176).

Thus, Lovecraft grounds his psychotopography in a real geography as a scene of struggle with the teleology of the Oedipal cycle. That psychotopography, as a bordering phenomenon, does not quite obliterate the paternal presence in the past, but does hollow it out so that the fiction renders it almost powerless by diluting its significance through the extra temporal. Consequently, the Lovecraftian imaginary becomes a place whose existence embraces America’s past without becoming determined by it. The shadowed landscape of his fiction is not haunted by the presence of colonial forefathers as much as it is preoccupied with coming to terms with the unknowable presence of the land itself—a re-examination of a foreclosed pre-colonial vision. In that regard, the land seems to abide by place but disregard city borders, so that real Providence blends into fictional Arkham and then spiders off into real Boston, fictional Dunwich, and back to real Salem, then moving to the coast into the fictional Innsmouth and Kingsport. When reading “Pickman’s Model” (1926), one see Boston become a geography of labyrinthine alleys



and subterranean tunnels, the history of which seems to predate the county. The meta-diegetic effect is subtle but effective. An artist creates representations of grotesque ghouls drawing on the surrounding historical area for inspiration, only to have the narrator discover a photograph that proves the grotesque representations as a physical reality that permeates the very landscape of Boston itself.

The character of Richard Upton Pickman himself becomes a challenge to one's traditional notions of a teleological American past. "The only saving grace of the present," Pickman tells the narrator, "is that it's too damned stupid to question the past very closely. What do maps and records and guide books really tell of the North-End? . . . these ancient places are dreaming gorgeously and overflowing with wonder and terror" ("Pickman's" 82). Lovecraft seeks to create alternate histories for the landscape, similar to Hawthorne's attempt in "Alice Doane's Appeal." In doing so, he disrupts any sense of linear narrative for the landscape and consequently renders teleology useless. These concepts become manifest in Pickman's paintings, each of which features one or more ghouls.<sup>11</sup>

The true horror of the paintings is their revelation that Americans do not belong to America; rather, the American landscape, especially Boston, belongs to an other, older order of being. "One disgusting canvas seemed to depict a vast cross-section of Beacon Hill, with ant-like armies of mephitic monsters squeezing themselves through burrows that honeycombed the ground" ("Pickman's" 85). Perhaps the most anti-patriarchal painting "which somehow shocked [the narrator] more than all the rest" is the one titled "Holmes, Lowell, and Longfellow Lie Buried in Mount Auburn." The painting depicts

an unknown vault, where scores of the beasts crowded about one who held a well-known Boston guide book and was evidently reading aloud. All were pointing to a

certain passage, and every face seemed so distorted with epileptic and reverberant laughter that I almost thought I heard the fiendish echoes.

Clearly Pickman's imagery threatens American history, as well as the commodification and marketing of that history. Moreover, the painting loosely hints that the ghouls somehow have knowledge of activities such as Curwin's threatened resurrection of Ben Franklin, adding yet another link in Lovecraft's parapsychical world.

In addition to voiding a unified cultural history of the United States, Pickman's paintings also incorporate for Lovecraft a dig at traditional American literature. As the narrator states, the pictures "turned colonial New England into a kind of annex of hell" ("Pickman's" 85). Yet the difference between the supposed representation and the reality becomes so blurred that the descriptions the narrator uses become a strange mix for the senses. Essentially the author pushes representation to become experience. For Lovecraft, as for Pickman, "places like that weren't merely made, but actually grew" (81). It seems no coincidence that Pickman's "four-time-great grandmother" was hanged on Gallows Hill in Salem, "with Cotton Mather looking sanctimoniously on." Lovecraft shows that for Pickman, as for Hawthorne, New England history is tangible, and ripples throughout their daily lives. Indeed, the subterranean tunnels Pickman discusses and paints actually do exist, but Lovecraft removes them from their Revolutionary War context and recasts them in the material eldritch, thus shifting them heterochronically.

Lovecraft crosses the border between the material and the mythical in "The Dreams in the Witch House" (1932). The presence of the house plays an important role, given that Lovecraft first titled the tale "The Dreams of Walter Gilman" (Joshi, Explanatory Notes, *Dreams* 443). In the tale, a student, Walter Gilman, rents a room in the Witch

House of Arkham, a former home of the suspected fugitive witch Keziah Mason. Through Gilman's dreams, Keziah Mason slowly haunts Gilman in an effort to convert him. The gable room in which he sleeps serves as a dimensional porthole through which Mason and her familiar, the rodentesque Brown Jenkin, move interdimensionally. The tale culminates with the destruction of Gilman, Mason, and eventually the house itself. The key to the tale is how Lovecraft bases the Witch House on the Salem Witch House, the home of Judge Jonathan Corwin. Though the actual Salem house belonged to a Judge, the Witch House of Arkham inverts that history and makes it the home of an accused witch. Yet Lovecraft continues to base his fictional Arkham in the real geography of Massachusetts, creating Arkham almost as a perversion of what the Puritan vision of Salem was meant to be. Consequently, the very idea of Arkham disrupts the imposed teleology of the New England landscape. Hence, Arkham exists alongside Salem in Lovecraft's psychotopography, it does not replace it.

The first sentences of the tale sums up its heart: "Whether the dreams brought on the fever or the fever brought on the dreams Walter Gilman did not know. Behind everything crouched the brooding, festering horror of the ancient town . . ." ("Dreams" 300). The line between the physical and the metaphoric becomes the primary threshold with which Walter Gilman and the reader must both wrestle. Moving from attic to house, from house to town, from town to region, and region to dimension, the infectious, "brooding, festering" horror spreads from the town until the reality becomes a meaningless link along an infinite, fictional, timeless, and seemingly unanchored signifying chain. The pun on "brooding" works well, since it implies both an atmosphere of the town as well as a self-generating multiplicity. In fact, the narrator says that in the

Witch House, “The darkness always teemed with unexplained sound—and [Gilman] shook with fear lest the noises he heard should subside and allow him to hear certain other fainter noises which he suspected were lurking behind them.” Within Arkham, significations remain unexplained, multiple, and ambivalent.

By referring to the Witch House and the Salem Witch Trials, Lovecraft enters Hawthorne’s landscape on his own terms. In fact, Keziah Mason, at her trial, “had told Judge Hathorne of lines and curves that could be made to point out directions leading through the walls of space to other spaces beyond” (“Dreams” 301). The effect of this reference is threefold. First, just as he mentioned Poe in “The Shunned House,” Lovecraft links himself with Nathaniel Hawthorne’s literary legitimacy while at the same time appropriating his real geographical landscape. Second, it pushes his Romantic, subtle Gothic to the edge, implying that even though Hawthorne may have judged his ancestors harshly, he didn’t come close to revealing the true horror surrounding witch and Puritan alike. Third, as in “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward,” it establishes a parapsychical transcendence that renders material codification useless, since “though the walls of space” there are “other spaces beyond.” Indeed, when Mason disappeared from her Salem jail cell in 1692, “not even Cotton Mather could explain the curves and angles smeared on the grey stone walls with some red, sticky fluid” (300).

Even Mason’s name recalls the idea of the physical. It signifies a builder, or stone workers. On yet another level of signification, it echoes the French word for house, *maison*. In a conflation of meaning, Lovecraft takes the name of his witch and conflates with the house itself and the material that helps comprise it, all while recalling the location of the house, since Mason practiced in the “dark valley of the white stone

beyond Meadow Hill” in Arkham. In fact, the white stone itself is “an object of age-long superstitious regard” (301, 331). These levels of meaning hint at merging subjectivity and materiality just enough to undermine traditional significations. In fact, the white stone, as an “object of age-long superstitious regard” also remains ambivalent. The description implies that it is surrounded with irrational belief. Yet since “superstitious” stems from the Latin *superstare*, to stand upon or over, and “regard” can be either a noun or a verb, the stone itself stands gazing at all of Arkham, turning the material object itself into a subject able to haunt. Slippage in signification of the physical emerges as one of the key elements to Mason’s black magic, at least as far as Lovecraft’s writing is concerned.

“The Dreams in the Witch House” focuses in on navigating an aporia between subjectivity and materiality. That the rat-like Brown Jenkin serves as the primary liaison between dimensions reveals Lovecraft’s conceptions of witchcraft in relation to material space. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White discuss these “tenants of the partitions” (Lovecraft, “Dreams” 306) in more sociological terms:

Just as the meaning of the grotesque body was transformed by its diacritical relation to the emergent notion of the bourgeois body, so the symbolic meaning of the rat was refashioned in relation to the sanitary and medical developments of the nineteenth century. . . . it was the threat to civilized life. . . . The rat, then, furtively emerged from the city’s underground conscience as the demonized Other. (143)

Thus, the presence of Brown Jenkin melds the idea of New England Witchcraft with the disruption of New England teleology. Moreover, he removes the supernatural from that ideal and makes it a natural parapsychical phenomenon. Mason “always appeared out of thin air near the corner where the downward slant met the inward slant” of the attic room (“Dreams” 310). These elements of the story emphasize the role, however vague, the material plays in understanding subjectivity.

Joshi argues that Lovecraft “made a genuine, and very provocative, attempt actually to visualize the fourth dimension” (*H. P. Lovecraft* 516). Yet that dimension contains “limitless abysses of inexplicably coloured twilight and bafflingly disordered sound” as well as objects “totally beyond description or even comprehension” (“Dreams” 304–305). Lovecraft’s abyss—his fourth dimension—sounds like an experiential manifestation of the what Kristeva describes as “a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct” to see what lies around and beyond it (18).

In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task . . . amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless “primacy” constituted by primal repression. Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, “subject” and “object” push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again—inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.

Lovecraft brings together the object and subject in the abject real of Keziah Mason’s fourth dimension.

That Walter Gilman only experiences this dimension while he dreams further emphasizes its unconscious origins. Gilman loses himself in this state while he dreams:

Of his own condition he could not well judge, for sight of his arms, legs, and torso seemed always cut off by some odd disarrangement of perspective; but he felt that his physical organization and faculties were somehow marvelously transmuted and obliquely projected—though not without a certain grotesque relationship to his normal proportions and properties. (“Dreams” 304)

In the final conflict between Gilman and Mason, Gilman kicks Brown Jenkin, the “morbidity,” the “furry blasphemy,” into the abyss (328). Yet Brown Jenkin returns, in a “crowning horror,” by gnawing “virtually a tunnel through [Gilman’s] body—something had eaten his heart out” (331). Cast back into the real, the intermediary between the material and subjectivity returns by bursting its way back through the chest of the subject

rather than through the material object of the walls of the house. Lovecraft renders the return of the repressed in an obliterating and grotesquely physical way.

Perhaps the most compelling and enigmatic of representation Lovecraft's psychotopographic tunnels appears in the novella "At the Mountains of Madness" (1931). With that tale, Lovecraft appears to synthesize—either directly or indirectly—aesthetics of Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Set in Antarctica, the tale is the narrative account of (William) Dyer and the Miskatonic Expedition told in order to discourage further exploration of the continent, specifically to stop the "proposed Starkweather-Moore Expedition" (279). Dyer and his crew use a newly developed boring device to research the geologic history of the region. The team's biologist, Lake, explores on his own and finds a massive mountain range as well as the frozen remains of Lovecraft's "Old Ones." Dyer eventually discovers that some grotesque force has attacked Lake's camp, and the traces of the frozen fossils have disappeared. Investigating further, they discover the Plateau of Leng, in which a city of cyclopean proportions has been built long before the existence of humans. Dyer and his graduate student Danforth explore the city, discovering on its walls in bas-relief most of the history of the Old Ones, including their creation and subjugation of the horrible, amorphous, bio-technological Shoggoths. After exploring, they never learn what caused the downfall of the city, but they do discover a living shoggoth moving about the caverns of the city and flee from it in terror. Flying away from the city, Danforth sees some final yet unseen horror that drives him mad as he looks back at the city from the sky.

The expedition, although thoroughly modern in its uses of technology, links up the Antarctic with Lovecraft's New England through its references to Miskatonic University

and Arkham. Like Poe, whose Pym moves from Massachusetts to the Antarctic cataract, Lovecraft's expedition anchors itself in New England, but pushes the boundaries of the Antarctic landscape to their signifying limits. It becomes a landscape of the abject, what Kristeva calls the "topology of catastrophe" (9). Unlike Poe's narrative, which sought to initiate an "alter ego" in the character of Pym, Lovecraft creates an entire alter ego for the New England landscape. Thus, both tales begin at their endings and operate in almost a cyclical way, only in Lovecraft's story, Dyer presents a warning, a plea not to repeat. Antarctica is a landscape of abjection for both writers, but "At the Mountains of Madness" presents that landscape as one fraught with the horrors of not keeping the correct distance from one's antecedents. Both ignoring their presence and coming too close to that presence risk ending in horror and oblivion.

In this context, Lovecraft transforms the Kaatskills of Irving into a landscape of horror. Like an abject Rip Van Winkle, Dyer ascends to the Plateau of Leng and descends inside the "mountains of madness." In "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" the idea of "madness" embodied the idea of being overtaken by the paternal presence and its perpetuation. The hollowed out mountains of madness, by extension, being "higher than the Himalayas" ("At the Mountains" 308), are a manifestation of that primary identity laid out in geography so as to render the American colonial landscape even more meaningless: "Of all existing lands it was infinitely the most ancient; . . . The great mountain chain was tremendously long . . . virtually crossing the entire continent" (307). Lovecraft compounds this vertiginous scale by hinting that,

even more monstrous exaggerations of Nature seemed disturbingly close at hand . . . one part of the ancient land—the first part that ever rose from the waters . . . which had come to be shunned as vaguely and namelessly evil. Cities built there had crumbled before their time, and had been found suddenly deserted. . . . these



abhorred things must have been much over 40,000 feet high—radically vaster than even the shocking mountains of madness we had crossed. (307–308)

Lovecraft then begins to give approximate coordinates of this land abhorred even by the horrific Old Ones. Michel Houellebecq points out that the tale “provides one of the most beautiful examples of such oneiric precision” and that by being so scientifically specific he “exploded the casing of the horror story” (74).

Lovecraft is scientifically specific about a still mostly unknown land, and that narrative strategy brings it even closer to a sense of reality. Again, Lovecraft melds the mythical with the real as he constructs his abject landscape on a much grander scale—the city has now become a continent. Like Poe, Lovecraft uses the blankness of the Antarctic as a psychotopography of abjection. Unlike Poe, Lovecraft uses that psychotopography as a land of layers—it is a geography of amplification, not just of mountains but also of signification. Whereas Pym finds a hole at the end of the Earth and a boundary of meaning, Dr. William Dyer encounters a new, half-comprehensible meaning of the blankness that threatens the end of the Earth. The first words of the story indicate that the narrator has encountered and is emerging from an alternate symbolic, the anchor of which predates the crisis-event of his own human subjectivity: “I am forced into speech because men of science have refused to follow my advice without knowing why” (“At the Mountains” 246). Men of science become reduced to idiots in the face of their threatened subjectivity. Dyer’s speech is a sign of a struggle to maintain his sense of humanity, not his intellectual superiority.

The scientific element of Lovecraft’s story adds plausibility, but otherwise it only serves to highlight the insignificance of any system of codification in the face of the abject, and even continues to alienate the reader. Dyer describes the Old One in terms of

science, with biological descriptions such as “It reproduced like the vegetable cryptogams, . . . having spore cases at the tips of the wings and evidently developing from a thallus or prothallus” (266). This language of classification simply states that the Old Ones were fungus-like beings that were undifferentiated into stem root or leaf. They are, on a grand scale, an embodiment of what Deleuze and Guattari call the rhizome.<sup>12</sup> Lovecraft’s narrator ultimately states, “But to give it a name at this stage was mere folly. . . . Altogether, little could be said to have been solved” (266). They “fell back on mythology for a provisional name—jocosely dubbing his finds ‘The Elder Ones’.” Ultimately, the joke proves horribly true, and the “primal myths” transgress into reality, threatening both humanity and subjectivity.

Despite knowing that “doubt of the real facts, as I must reveal them, is inevitable; yet if I suppressed what will seem extravagant and incredible there would be nothing left,” Dyer recounts his narrative (“At the Mountains” 246). He knows his narrative will appear as fancy or even psychotic hallucination to his scientific colleagues, and they will dismiss his warnings “without knowing why”: Danielle Bergeron argues, “At odds with meaning and functioning and under a logic other than that of the conscious and the rational, the signifiers that give voice to the unconscious always stand as non-sense in the usual narratives that make of the ego their hero” (“Signifier” 61). Having been to and beyond and beneath the “Mountains of Madness,” Dyer has experienced the abject, the symptom of which “is the rejection and reconstruction of languages” (Kristeva 45). Shoggoths, the Mi-Go, Fungi from Yoggoth, Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Kaddath—these names and the alien words that cluster alongside them form an alternate, timeless symbolic that impedes on the subject and collapses it by replacing inaugural loss with a

backward-looking crisis-event of utter alterity and inhuman determinism. Danforth, the graduate student who witnesses the horror with Dyer and who takes the final look back as they are flying away, becomes reduced to whispering “disjointed and irresponsible things.” (339). Having witnessed the primal anchor of that alterity—a “single, fantastic, daemonic glimpse, among the zenith churning clouds, of what lay back of those other violet westward mountains which the Old Ones shunned and feared”—Danforth suffers a “breakdown” in every sense of the term (338).

Dyer, on the other hand, must remain one step removed so that he will be able to recount the tale. Lovecraft allows the mountains themselves to serve as an *objet a* for Dyer; while they expose him to the abject, he does not suffer a breakdown as Danforth does precisely because they shield him from even larger horrors that lie beyond it. Hence, his whole narrative stands as a neurotic attempt to dissuade others from seeking to encounter that primal object. Bergeron asserts that “With the neurotic, the very structure of the dream chains the signifiers around the lacking signifier, that unacknowledged thing in the navel of the dream. With the psychotic, by contrast, the signifiers may reorganize but will not fully chain” (“Work” 77–78). After his breakdown, Danforth remains in a psychotic state. Dyer, on the other hand, constructs his narrative of the mountains and its cyclopean city around the mythic, but never witnessed, Plateau of Leng. Thus, the mountains and the shoggoth Dyer encounters in them serve to shatter his sense of subjectivity in relation to other humans, but help to keep him from truly obliterating all together. His is the speech of the borderline subject, which, according to Kristeva, “is a frantic attempt made by the subject threatened with sinking into a void. A void that is not

nothing but indicates, within its discourse, a challenge to symbolization” (51).<sup>13</sup> He remains in between.

Perhaps the best example of this chaining is the enigmatic “Tekeli-li.” Dyer recalls that “Danforth has hinted at queer notions about unsuspected and forbidden sources to which Poe may have had access when writing his *Arthur Gordon Pym* a century ago” (“At the Mountains” 331). The word “of unknown but terrible and prodigious significance connected with the Antarctic,” the bird’s cry of “Tekeli-li,” becomes the hideous “piping” that the shoggoths make inside the mountain. Yet that word is only the “imitated accents of their bygone masters,” the Old Ones (335). By constructing this explained but still enigmatic origin for the term, Lovecraft constructs an enigmatic chain of signification whose anchor remains hidden by the mountains themselves. Moreover, he writes Poe into that signification, so that the natives of Tsalal and the Antarctic birds that Pym encounters on his voyage imitate the sounds of the shoggoths. The shoggoths in turn only imitate the Old Ones, who in turn shun the horrible Plateau of Leng, which remains unrevealed. Dyer only hears Danforth witness it, yet Danforth, upon seeing the plateau, shrieks out “the repetition of a single mad word of all too obvious source” (340). Obvious though it may be, the source still remains an unknowable and enigmatic object that will not allow a narrative resolution. As a result, the Antarctic remains a looming and hauntingly blank threat to signification and subjectivity.

On a personal level, Lovecraft confronts his literary predecessors in a manner that both acknowledges them and removes their influence. Irving, Hawthorne, and especially Poe are all of Lovecraft’s “masters,” and by reinventing their psychotopographies within his chain of “*beyondness*,” he keeps them at a distance within his own topos. Like

Melville, who reconceived a patricidal narrative on the level of an imagined personal narrative, Lovecraft reimagines an American literary landscape based on what he terms “alienage.”

Lovecraft successfully brings that haunting threat back home by connecting it to his own infectious landscape of horror. When Dyer and Danforth flee the Shoggoth, “[Danforth] was chanting the familiar stations of the Boston-Cambridge tunnel that burrowed through our peaceful native soil thousands of miles away in New England” (“At the Mountains” 335). Dyer understands the analogy as a comparison of the Shoggoth to a subway train, but it also seems that Lovecraft subtly makes the implication to his reader that such things already exist in the subway tunnels of New England, especially considering the diegesis of his psychotopography. The narrator of “Pickman’s Model” refuses to take the subway any more. In “The Dreams of the Witch House,” Walter Gilman sees the Old Ones in his dreams, and awakes to find he has brought back with him a small idol of one which the professors cannot classify. Lovecraft even states, “The mystery remains unsolved to this day, the image is on exhibition at the museum of Miskatonic University” (“Dreams” 321). The tunnels of the Antarctic Mountains echo the tunnels of Joseph Curwin in Providence, and the thing under the basement in “The Shunned House” appears to be some form of a shoggoth. In creating these images, Lovecraft connects New England and Antarctica psychologically, and he does so while appropriating Poe and Hawthorne’s diegetic worlds.

Yet Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville were working within a framework that Irving began. One sees with “At the Mountains of Madness” a chain of continuing signification that ends at the South Pole. Like Pym, one does find a hole at that end of the Earth, but it

is not a physical one. Rather, Lovecraft creates a yawning, unknowable, aporetic gap of signification upon which rests, retroactively, the expression of alienated nineteenth century American writers. While he offers explanations for Hawthorne's witches or Poe's Antarctic voyages, he resituates those narratives, without diminishing their haunting quality, into an amplifying, larger chain of signification—an encompassing atavistic mythos—that acknowledges American colonial history yet neutralizes it at the same time.

### Notes

1. Timothy Evans defines this thinking as “a search for an ‘authentic’ Colonial landscape which would transport [Lovecraft] into an uncorrupted past” (180). At the time Lovecraft was doing his most prolific writing (1922–1933), this “Colonial Revival” sought to set up more “‘prescriptive’ tourist literature” the aim of which was to create “a nationwide canon of tourist sites that defined America and Americans.” In a way, this movement as Evans describes it seems the logical next step after what Myra Jehlen terms the “American Incarnation” (3) of the previous century. Having established the sites and landscapes that embodied America, the nation needed now to “museumize” (Anderson 182) those sites in the popular culture. Interestingly, it is about this same time that scholars began reviving Melville and re-casting *Moby-Dick* as one of America's greatest novels. If the zeitgeist of the American Renaissance—most notably embodied in Emerson's “Nature”—was manifest in the idea of an “American Incarnation,” then Joyce Carol Oates' characterization of Lovecraft's fictional landscape as “a mock transcendentalism in which ‘spirit’ resides everywhere except possibly in human beings” seems oddly appropriate (viii). The seeds for that landscape lie in Poe, and the original issues he had with “Frogpondium.”

2. Victoria Nelson explains “psychotopography” thusly: “When the inner life of the psyche is allegorized so concretely, the outer world of objects becomes a perfect mirror in which to view the fragments of one's projected soul. . . . Viewed in this framework, the outer landscape does not simply mirror our inner feelings; rather, in the tradition of Neoplatonic natural philosophy, the human soul, the *parvus mundus*, contains within itself the heavenly macrocosm. Each mirrors the other and reverberates at the points of coincidence, and behind both is posited a deeper transcendental reality” (“H. P. Lovecraft” 110). Nelson contrasts this with the Victorian “pathetic fallacy” and states, “To these interior psychic regions as we find them projected onto an outer landscape I would like to give the name psychotopography. A psychotopographer is the artist who devotes herself to describing—with varying degrees of awareness about the true nature of the subject—the images of these inner regions as she discovers them in an imagined exterior landscape. Working backward from the sum of these details, the reader gains a picture not of what lies without but of what lies within. . . . The contents of the psyche are

cast like a net in ever-widening circles, first onto immediate surroundings—furniture, rooms, houses—then onto the larger natural landscape, finally even onto the globe itself” (110–111).

3. The word “eidolon” also echoes Poe’s word choice in the 1844 poem, “Dream-Land”: “By a route obscure and lonely, / Haunted by ill angels only, / Where an Eidolon, named Night, / On a black throne reigns upright, / I have wandered home but newly / From this ultimate dim Thule” (70). Poe frames his poem with this stanza, ending the first with the added two lines: “From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime, / Out of SPACE — Out of TIME.” This glancing reference to Poe’s Poem describes the narrator of “The Outsider” rather well. More interestingly, Poe’s reference to “ultimate dim Thule” invokes the image of an eldritch northern geographical land believed to be at the literal end of the Earth at the pole. Given both Poe’s and Lovecraft’s narrative journey’s to the Antarctic, one sees in this reference a possible root of Lovecraft’s psychotopography. One could suggest that “The Outsider” is a precursor of the Shoggoths of Lovecraft’s mythos.

4. “The Festival” takes place in the fictional town of Kingsport, and interestingly he makes this exact description when describing a graveyard in Marblehead, MA — the suggested inspiration for Kingsport (*Lord* 114).

5. “That is, while often repressing a direct memory of the event, such children play games that symbolically reproduce the dreadful experience. Because they make no conscious connections, however, the wound is never healed by this enactment; it is only unconsciously displayed over and over again” (Nelson 134).

6. Foucault points out how one of the last traits of heterotopias is to “create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory. . . . Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. I am thinking, for example, of the first wave of colonization in the seventeenth century, of the Puritan societies that the English had founded in America and that were absolutely perfect other places” (“Of Other” 27). Of course, those colonies were only perfect in idea alone, as the Salem Witch Trials and Hawthorne point out. Lovecraft sees them as perfect places for material horror—heterocronies that bring along with them both a disregard for time and time’s disregard for the human.

7. “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” was not published until 1941, after Lovecraft’s death. Joshi points out that the “core idea of the novel may have been conceived as early as 1923” (Explanatory Notes, *Thing* 387–388). Joshi points out that Lovecraft states he wanted “to write a novel of a more naturalistic setting, in which some hideous threads of witchcraft trail down the centuries against the somber & memory-haunted background of ancient Salem.”

8. The narrator makes it a point that the “tastes” of Charles Dexter Ward are his “devotion to ancient things” so that “history, genealogy, and the study of colonial

architecture, furniture, and craftsmanship at length crowded everything else from his sphere of interests” (“Case 92). The grouping together of the three categories and their exclusion of any other subject at least hints at the Oedipal implications behind that triad—forefathers, their deeds, and the material objects that embody both identity and deed.

9. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927) Lovecraft expresses a particular admiration for both *House of the Seven Gables* and “Edward Randolph’s Portrait”: “*Edward Randolph’s Portrait* in *Legends of the Province House*, has its diabolic moments” (63). He also refers to *The House of the Seven Gables* as “New England’s greatest contribution to weird literature,” conveying “an instant authenticity of the atmosphere around us” (64). Note that Joseph Curwin’s papers are hidden behind his portrait in the same way the old Pyncheon deeds are hidden behind Colonel Pyncheon’s portrait.

10. Lovecraft’s narrator perhaps best describes the parapsychical (as opposed to the supernatural) in “The Shunned House” (1924) when he states, “To actually believe in vampires or werewolves would be a carelessly inclusive statement. Rather must it be said that we were not prepared to deny the possibility of certain unfamiliar and unclassified modifications of vital force and attenuated matter; existing very infrequently in three dimensional space because of its more intimate connexion with other spatial units, yet close enough to the boundary of our own to furnish us occasional manifestations which we, for lack of proper vantage-point, may never hope to understand” (106). Thus, Lovecraft’s world is not supernatural—it is not a world of ghosts and phantoms as much as it is a world of physical dimensions, of which one is time.

11. Lovecraft’s narrator describes the “ghouls” thus: “The madness and monstrosity lay in the figures in the foreground—for Pickman’s morbid art was preeminently one of daemonic portraiture. These figures were seldom completely human, but often approached humanity in varying degree. Most of the bodies, while roughly bipedal, had a forward slumping, and a vaguely canine cast. The texture of the majority was a kind of unpleasant rubberiness. . . . One canvas shewed a ring of them baying about a hanged witch on Gallows Hill, whose dead face held a close kinship to theirs” (84).

12. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of the rhizome as an extension of their anti-Oedipal theories and deterritorialization. In biology, it is horizontal underground stem that send out roots and shoots from its body—a form or tuber or fungus. As a metaphoric manifestation of the state and process of deterritorialization, it is a manifestation of multiplicities and productive transgression of hierarchical arborescent systems of signification. “The rhizome is an anti-genealogy” (*Thousand Plateaus* 11). They “summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome” further:

unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible to



neither the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five etc. It is not a multiple derived from the one, or to which one is added ( $n+1$ ). It is comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows. (21)

The concept is closely connected to Kristeva's concepts of the abject. A non-horrific, productive state of abjection of sorts, since the abject only exists in relation to the Lacanian Oedipal system of signification and inaugural loss that establishes the paternal metaphor. Deleuze and Guattari adopt an anti-Lacanian stance with the anti-Oedipal rhizome.

Lovecraft, in exploring and pushing the boundaries of signification, does not escape an encounter of the paternal metaphor, but does strain and resist it, ultimately seeking alternate systems and metaphors that supercede the paternal metaphor. Deleuze and Guattari term Lovecraft's narrator in "The Outsider" as a form of Rhizome (*Thousand Plateaus* 245), yet he does fall back in line with an eldritch, albeit alien or foreign, system of signification.

13. The borderline subject, Kristeva observes, has a speech in which "non-sense runs through signs and sense, and the resulting manipulation of words is not an intellectual play but, without any laughter, a desperate attempts to hold on to the ultimate obstacles of a pure signifier that has been abandoned by the paternal metaphor" (50–51).

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